

PCZONE

ISSUE 207 JUNE 2009

★ SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S ISSUE ★

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MAFIA CLASH AGAIN!

**Warrant
Issued For
Mob Head's
Arrest!**

**COPS CLOSE
TO BUSTING
CRIMINAL
RING!**

**Mechanic's
Motor
Misdemeanour!**

**EX-MOBSTER
TOMMY ANGELO
GUNNED DOWN
IN GARDEN!**



EMPIRE CITY'S MOST WANTED! Accomplices are thought to be aiding these criminals escape from the scenes of their crimes

**SEEDY
CRIMINAL
UNDERWORLD
EXPOSED!**

BY DANIEL VAVRA

Two rival mobster families clashed in violent scenes this weekend in Empire City, leaving 13 men dead.

The shootout saw a brewery completely destroyed as the rival gangs showed no consideration for the business' owner or any of the innocent bystanders. "The entire brewery has been totally ruined," said one eyewitness who did not wish to be named. "The walls are literally covered in bullet holes. The noise was deafening."

"We've been hot on the tails of one member of the gang, who goes by the name of 'Vito'," said Detective Tony Rossi, the man charged with investigating this crime.

"These criminals are no goons. We think they're in cohorts with at least one unknown collaborator who is helping these killers escape by providing new clothing and vehicles when they demand them.

"But we've had a tip off that these gangs are holding secret meetings in bars and restaurants. We know where these places are and we're closely monitoring all of them."

The Mayor of Empire City has been criticised of late for turning a blind eye to much of the Mafia's criminal activity, leaving local and hard-working folk of Empire City fearing for their safety.

Continued p54 →

FINAL FRONTIER NOT FINAL!

CRYPTIC HAPPENINGS AROUND as sightings of a new Star Trek Online universe materialised, following high levels of secret activity in the San Francisco area. Expert Craig Zinkovetz boldly told us: "We've been aware of these developments for a long time; they appear to be far more advanced than anything we've ever seen." {cont. p42}

IT'S GOO TO BE BACK!

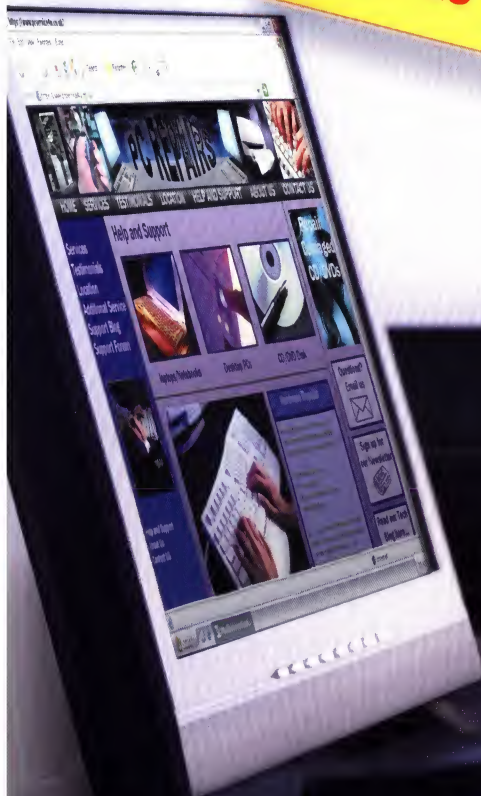
THE 2D BOYS are back in the frame for crimes against games development, as World of Goo takes centre stage once more. The so called 'experimental' gameplay has angered big-name developers who spend upwards of {cont. p108}

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**PCZONE**

Contents

In this issue of the UK's best PC mag...

MARG AND STARS

D ID I MENTION that I found a tub of marg in my desk drawers on my first day here? It looked like it had been there a while, but then marg doesn't age well outside of a fridge. I binned it and I've been feeling a bit guilty as I found out it belonged to Log, so thought I'd confess.

Anyway! What do you think about our Collector's Edition *Mafia II* cover? We're chuffed with it and the game deserves no less than the special effort we undertook to secure *Mafia II* this issue. Turn to page 54 for Steve's Czech beer-fuelled article.

We've also got first looks and hands-ons coming out of our ears. Steve spends more time out of the office than in these days, heading out to California to visit Cryptic to look at *Star Trek Online* and *Champions Online*, and as I write this he's heading to the airport for the aforementioned 2K Czech visit.

I've now renewed my media visa so I can travel to the US, so I'm hoping some fancy trips will come my way. Queuing outside the American Embassy at 8am, I was in good company as Mani and Bobby Gillespie from Primal Scream were there too! I don't think they'd actually been to bed. How very rock.

Also, we've secured new gaming servers courtesy of Multiplay – head to page 102. And don't forget to enter our competition to win a PC worth £1,000 on page 82!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood,
Editor

ali.wood@futurenet.com

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COVER STORY

MAFIA II

If you've ever wanted to be a gangster, here's your chance with the return of *Mafia*



34

SMACK MY MOUSE UP!

How well do gaming mice stand up to geek rage? Find out right here!

**28 DEMIGOD****38 FUEL****42 STAR TREK ONLINE**

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See page 48





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ONLINE ZONE
FIGHT CLUB!
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THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

The sequel to the most under-rated game ever

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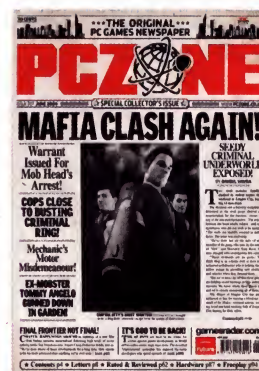
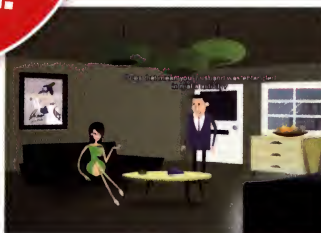
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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



54 MAFIA II

Too busy? PC ZONE in 81 words...
We're gangster happy this issue, what with the exclusive peek deep inside *Mafia II*, as our deeply cool cover has already told you. Isn't it just a job very well done? Elsewhere we have a look inside the upcoming *The Sims 3*, the *Star Trek* and *Champions* MMOs, and we play around with *Riddick* – one of the few times running around with knives is encouraged. There's so much more in, we've run out of room to tell you about it here.

98 FREWARE

Find out which game has the rudest title ever, plus battle with rocket-armed dinos and *David Brown*.



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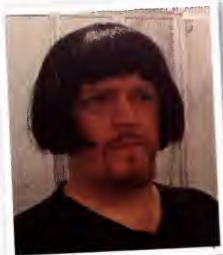
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Closing date: 13 May, 2009.
Full offer details on page 48.

Meet The Team

The team dedicated to bringing you gaming goodness



JON BLYTH

Victim of Crime

AGE 33

LIKES His friends

DISLIKES Thieves

FANCIES Justice

FAVOURITE GAME British

Bulldogs

NOW PLAYING World of Goo

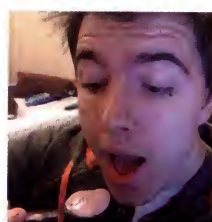


ALI WOOD

Editor

Ms Wood danced into the office after seeing *The Sims 3*. But stopped when she realised they'll be another *IKEA* expansion pack.

NOW PLAYING: *Assault on Dark Athena*



STEVE HOGARTY

Deputy Editor

Mr Hogarty is a rare sight. When he's not jetting off to the US and spots in Europe to check out the latest games, he's on holiday. And he claims his job's hard!

NOW PLAYING: at skiving off

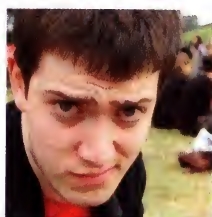


DAVID BROWN

Staff Writer

The PCZ team locked Mr Brown in a sealed room with a basketball, candy floss, and two sarcastic hamsters. He has yet to escape. Point-and-click expert indeed!

NOW PLAYING: *Gabriel Knight*



ED ZITRON

Pseudo-American freelancer

This month Mr Zitron joined a cult that believed George W Bush was the Messiah. A sharp blow to his head restored his sanity and he left the Republican party (rim-shot).

NOW PLAYING: *Dawn of War II*



CHRIS CAPEL

Occasional freelancer

Despite being forewarned that he'll be appearing on the *Meet the Team* page, Mr Capel failed to do anything interesting. He has since been punished.

NOW PLAYING: *Red Alert 3*



ADAM GLICK

Regular freelancer

Believing that *Mirror's Edge* cured his acrophobia, Mr Glick decided to climb Big Ben. He got as high as the top of the stairs to the House of Parliament before fainting.

NOW PLAYING: *F.E.A.R.*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Sunlight and warm weather, games turning up on time.

WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Games going missing in the post and phones not working.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

"BECAUSE I BOUGHT AN IPHONE" 2 hours Time Steve spent trying to cancel his mobile phone contract with 3.

WATCHMEN 20mins Just nowhere near as good as the graphic novel.

BRONSON 3mins Richard gets blank stares when talking about his new favourite movie.

CATS AND DOGS 6mins Time spent watching videos of vomiting kittens and sleepwalking dogs.

THE SECRET TREKKER 12mins Surprise as art editor Matt outs himself as a *Star Trek* fan!

"IT WAS HORRIBLE!" 3mins Steve complains at being forced to spend a weekend in San Francisco for free.

BAD TASTE BACK PAGE Hours The struggle to come up with a Back Page that isn't offensive.

PCZ'S NEW LOOK 43mins Ali and Matt tried to convince the bosses PCZ hasn't been redesigned.

IT'S ALI'S INFLUENCE 27mins Everyone stops to comment about how tidy PCZ's desks are as they pass by.

COSPLAYERS 8mins We all agreed cosplayers aren't funny any more, and to stop laughing at them.

WIN!



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Letters

Ali Wood felt like she was on *Blue Peter*, rifling through the mailbag



WIN!



Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper, or if you're at all PC-literate (which we're guessing you are) fingers to keyboard. The monarch gets a new MSI P45 Neo3 motherboard. The Neo3 supports Intel's Quad and Dual Core CPUs, and has an Easy OC Switch for quick overclocking, making it perfect for gamers.

KING OF LETTERS



FRUITY AWARDS

Fed up with poor quality publishing of PC games? Sounds like we need our own version of the Razzies movie awards to name and shame those who should do better. Here's my nomination: Ubisoft:

Congratulations Ubisoft – you're the poster child for everything that's wrong with PC gaming today.

On installing a brand new title the day after it is released, I want to get on with the game – not sit around for a few hours watching 40298560 bytes of auto-patch download. (Cheers, *HAWX*.)

Likewise I do not expect a published title to be broken out of the box. Step forward *Blazing Angels* – a console port that faithfully replicates the start-up sequence from the Xbox version right to the point where you twirl the joystick

to start the engine and get airborne and... oh what's this, the PC version doesn't have a joystick? No problem, let's automatically start the plane trundling down the runway without doing the 'engine start' event and... oh it always crashes into the ground, allowing exactly nothing of the game to be played?

How did that one get past beta testing, you twonks?

But the coup de grâce must surely be releasing software that uses disc copy protection which adversely affects their customers' expensive hardware. Step forward once more Ubisoft, for your marketing brilliance in using StarForce to ensure that your current customers look forward to your future releases with the same bemused expression as a man

walking down the pavement, inspecting the sole of his shoe and releasing that it wasn't a Mars bar he just trod on.

Ubisoft, we salute you.

Ian Huxley

I am such an optimist. I always expect the best from people and then feel brutally let down when they don't deliver. I feel the same way about games (especially getting code in on time to review it somewhere near the date it is meant to be released).

Clearly Ian, you too feel like you've been let down but instead of having a plain old rant, you've turned it into a clever awards idea, which we promise we will not steal without your permission. Ian, we salute you!

"What, no-one to kill? I thought this was *GTA4*!"



SLAVE LABOUR

I have a question: since the release of the Xbox, I have upgraded my PC many times. Games are frequently released across PC and Xbox simultaneously, well the PC version usually later! The Xbox hardware has remained the same for years, so why will current PC games not have played on my PC of four years ago? Is it that developers are forced to optimise console games, while not bothering with the PC version, simply asking that we buy a new graphics card etc? (eg *BioShock* needing Shader 3.0).

Grand Theft Auto IV is a case in point. OK it may not run perfectly on the

Xbox, but you need a pretty hefty PC in comparison to run it. Are we as PC owners sacrificing putting up with slack ports and downloading massive patches within weeks of a game's release to have a console game with slightly better graphics because the developers don't put the same effort into PC releases as console ones, or are we all just beta testers for games nowadays?

Robert Davey

Yes, everyone who buys a PC game right after its release is just testing it. Aren't you getting the paycheck every month? We do.

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Irritated *Empire* fans
march on Valve's HQ.

WAR ISN'T FUN

I want to run screaming from the house... first *GTA4*, and now *Empire: Total War*, with this pain in the arse online activation.

"You only need to connect to the internet once," according to the instructions. I've never used Steam before so I was nonplussed when it installed, verified my key code, and then said "Servers busy - try again in a few minutes". I haven't even put the second DVD in the computer yet, has the game installed? Then eventually up comes the Steam window, so I naively click on "Launch" only for the message "you can play in 11 hours 35 minutes" to pop up.

WHAT THE F**K!? Is that online, or something? I have verified my copy so why can't I just play single-player now, please?

Meanwhile Jonny Pirate is enjoying playing *Empire: Total War* free of hassles, no doubt. I only want to play a game I have bought legitimately, like all the previous *Total War* games. By all means verify my copy of the game, but don't piss me off to the extent where I consider, for the first time ever, getting pirated games in future just to avoid this bollocks.

Gavin Hay

PS: I had to re-install the game, then it asked for disk two. But I can't just click on an icon and play single-player; I have to launch Steam; let it update; select offline mode... this is insane!

More and more publishers are adopting this approach in an attempt to combat piracy recently, and we totally feel your pain at PCZ towers.

Let's just hope there weren't other readers with similar issues.

WAR ISN'T... ETC

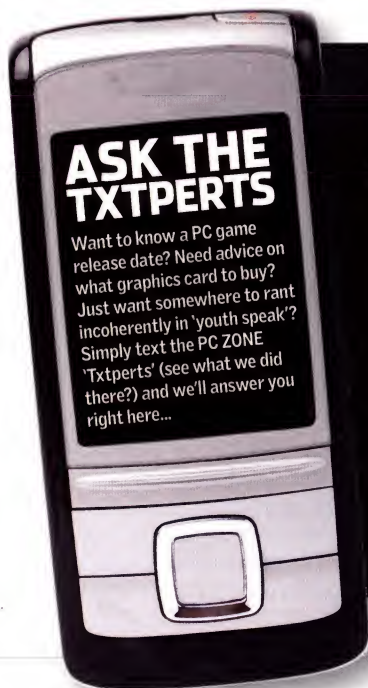
This is a request from a disillusioned subscriber. In your recent, glowing review of *Empire: Total War* I failed to find any mention of the fact that you need an internet connection and a Steam account to play the game.

I read it three times and I may have missed it, but should not that info

appear in your At A Glance bit? There are people who use your reviews as a decider on whether or not to buy games, and given the crap hurricane that has occurred with a lot of failed downloads etc., it would have been nice if your reviewer had given everybody a heads-up that installing the God-awful Steam was a requirement.

I know it's impossible for you to anticipate the furore that has happened since general release, but a complete review from yourselves with perhaps your experience of installing the game would help us.

Lee Curran



ASK THE TXTPERTS

Want to know a PC game release date? Need advice on what graphics card to buy? Just want somewhere to rant incoherently in 'youth speak'? Simply text the PC ZONE 'Txtperts' (see what we did there?) and we'll answer you right here...

How come your review didn't mention that *Empire: Total War* is as buggy as a bug being badly bugged in a bug related bug incident? You buggers.
Kev

Sadly, we can only test games on a finite number of PCs. If we don't have any problems on these computers, we can't comment on any that might occur on other gamers' machines.

David spelt "Alanis Morissette" wrong on page 36 of issue 206. How are you ever going to fend off all the angry, pitchfork-wielding Canadians, hmm?
Residents of Ontario

And that's another reason why you shouldn't trust David. But I'm not worried about Canadians taking revenge on us - they're just too damn nice to attack anyone.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Sent in by Ryan 'Rhino' Williams
PC ZONE SCORE 95%

It was not so long ago now that I stepped into the shoes of many before me and discovered the delights and frights of a perfect world such as *Oblivion*. Twenty minutes into the game and I've already experienced the glory of the Imperial City and fought off countless monsters alongside my AI friends the Imperial guards.

This game raised the bar of RPGs by an infinite amount. Its graphics and gameplay are only just challenged by *Fallout 3* (funnily enough made by the same company), Bethesda have continually amazed us these past years and long may it remain so!

YOUR SHOUT 99%



Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



Isn't she *Ironica*?

Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87474, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text - and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

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➤ We didn't mention anything about these problems with *Empire: Total War*, because we didn't encounter them when playing the game.

Let's just hope there weren't other readers with... oh come off it!

WAR... OH F*** IT

We have waited for sooo long for *Empire: Total War*, and sadly, I feel let down. The battle graphics are pretty shoddy in places, not as good as the previous game in the series, *Medieval II*. The campaign map is confusing, some of the text is very difficult to read and the graphics have this toy town feel, which might be an attempt to capture the naïve style of the 18th Century, but just looks unfinished.

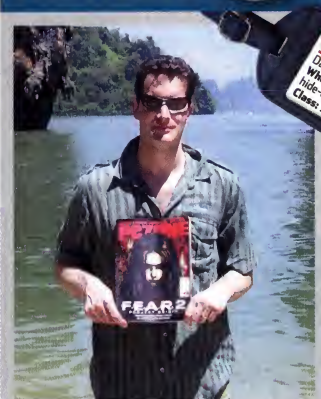
The naval battles are very good graphically, you do need a porky PC to play with large fleets, but given the detail that is to be expected. It can get confusing, with ships scooting all over the place, but that actually captures the essence of naval combat at this time.

My main problem is that the game feels unfinished, more like a late beta, still needing some real polishing before release. If you told me that *Empire* had been produced by another company, trying to ape the *Total War* series, I'd believe you. The game feels like it should have been released prior to *Medieval II*, not some years afterwards!

Gavin Hay

Look on the bright side: you didn't have any problems installing it.

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

Fallout 3 is in the *Buyer's Guide*. The Pitt won't be. Ever.



"It's shocking to see that *Fallout 3* doesn't appear in the *Buyer's Guide*"

MISSING IN ACTION?

I just completed *Fallout 3* and I must say it is a great game and one that I truly enjoyed playing. So it's shocking to see that it doesn't appear in the *Buyer's Guide*, especially after getting a PC ZONE Classic award.

My recommendation is that you remove *Devil May Cry 4* (button-bashing mindless console conversion) which only scored 82% and replace it with *Fallout 3*, which can easily fit the Action/Adventure heading and will serve as a better recommendation to your readers.

A game scoring 80% should not be in the *Buyer's Guide*, so the same goes for *NHL 08* and *FIFA 08* (outclassed by *PES 08*). I'm sure that you can easily replace these titles with others that are well-worth recommending (such as *Red Alert 3*, *Galactic Civilisations II*, and *Battlefield 2*). Sport games aren't the most popular on the PC (aside from *Football Manager*) so there's no reason to have five games in the *Buyer's Guide*, especially when some of these games are not in the same league as other titles in the guide.

I believe that you should maintain the high standards across the *Buyer's Guide* to ensure that it includes only the best titles and nothing less.

Finally, I would like to congratulate you all on a superb magazine which is a joy to read and has just the right balance between being entertaining and informative. Please keep up the good work.

Shay Zach

We love *Fallout 3* too and that's why it's in the *Buyer's Guide* this month. We'd planned all along to include it in this issue. Honest.

HARD-ON

Having been a reader of your mag since that delicious add-ons CD for *Quake* and its sequel was attached to the front, I've never had reason to complain. I love coming home from work to see PC ZONE on the door mat, and I do understand the late winter months leave the magazine a little thin.

Like most hardcore gamers, I'm as interested in Hardware as in software. So due to the lack of game releases, I expected the last three issues to be crammed with the latest components that have arrived since Christmas. Where's the full GTX295 review?

I look at the Hardware Divide section and see that this hasn't been altered for months. At least half of that should have been updated by now. I can understand to a certain extent. If I had your job I'd want to get paid for playing *Left 4 Dead* all day, who wouldn't?

Also, when things are a little light on game releases, why can't you extend the *Dear Wandy* section? Everyone I know loves it. I'll always buy your great mag, just promise me you'll shape up!

Mark Wickenden

We honestly don't play *Left 4 Dead* all day, but we do have to keep up with the CVG.co.uk staff, who do play *Mario Kart Wii* all day. This issue you'll find that *Hardware Buyer* has been updated with lots of new, pricey kit.



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM A DECADE AGO, ANSWERED TODAY

MONEY WORRIES

Am I being paranoid, or am I the only person who smells something rotten in the state of games software? I don't buy as many games as I would like to, because I can't justify the expense. I mean, my last gas bill was only £50, so I think twice about spending £40 on just one game.

Sandy Howard, Telford

What amazes me is that in the 16 years since you wrote this letter Sandy, the price of a game hasn't really changed, but the cost of gas has. I think the real issue here is with the gas people.

Mind you, if the price of games had gone up along with the removal of those lovely floppy manuals and taken our beloved floppy disks, we'd be right annoyed.



BACK IN MY DAY...

I just read your editorial on your gaming scores and on how they matter. I've been reading your magazine since day one. I think your reviews are bang on; the scores do guide me. Especially the reviews that are honest and straight to the point. I do make the odd choice on my own, but these days I feel that developers rely on massive advertising, mostly aimed at kids.

So tell your guys to keep on what they are doing! I still love the mag.

Mark Francis

Ahhhh, yours is the type of letter that makes this job really worthwhile. If we could give you a big PC ZONE hug we would. **PCZ**

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COVER STORY

MAFIA II

Welcome to a time when men wore hats and it was cool



THE BACKDROP TO *Mafia II* is a fictional blend of New York and San Francisco, a heady mix of two distinct mafioso atmospheres pervading every ounce of the game. *Mafia II*'s got atmosphere coming out its ears, its incredible world is at all times cinematic, a forever changing, often surprising city that brims with life and character, from its retro cars to the fashion choices of its AI pedestrians. You won't hear us say this often, but playing this game will make you feel like you're entrenched in the 1950s. It's been a year since we last visited 2K Czech – we fell in love with *Mafia II* then, and we're ready to fall at its feet all over again. Welcome to Empire Bay City.

PAGE

54

**PCZONE**

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**

WATERY ENDS

THERE'S A LOT of chatter about the next *BioShock* as the hype gets in gear, from the somethinginthesea.com teaser website, to the emergence of the Big Sister, a female version of the hulking Big Daddy. Rumour has it that more details will be revealed at the annual Game Developers Conference, but if you can't wait until then, it's lucky that we've rounded up all the pieces of information we could lay our hands on. Keep an eye out for next month's issue, as we'll have an exclusive chat with Irrational and plenty of tasty new screens to go with it.

Although I've already mentioned it in my Ed's letter, I want to draw your attention to our exclusive *Mafia II* article on page 54. We moved heaven and earth (well, deadlines) to make sure we were the first to bring you brand-new information on 2K Czech's gangster game. *Mafia* fans will spot our inspiration for our cover came from the game's first manual.

Steve and David also had far too much fun smashing up the mice for our stress test. When discussing our plans, I noticed our IT guy giving us funny looks. I don't think he could bear to hear about technology being so badly treated.

Finally, we've had a few emails about issues with *Empire: Total War*. We've alerted Creative Assembly to the problems, and you can rest assured they're doing all they can to rectify them. Or else.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood, Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

RAPTUROUS APPLAUSE

Are we really delving back into the oceans for some more Adam?

DEVELOPER 2K Marin PUBLISHER 2K Games
WEBSITE 2kgames.com/bioshock ETA Winter 2009

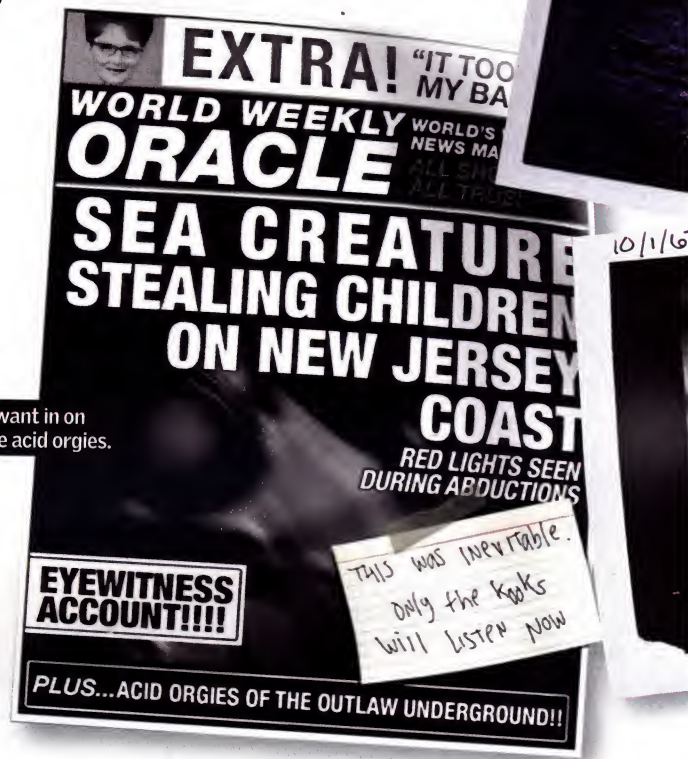
SPECULATION IS RIFE and the facts may well have changed since we supplied the printers with these words you're reading now, but at the time of writing we know a few things about what *BioShock 2* will be about. Without wanting to appear too dramatic, the facts you read below could be rather surprising.

First of all, we know that the main character (you) will be a Big Daddy. Actually, *the* Big Daddy – the very first one created in Rapture, who has somehow managed to survive the original cataclysm, and the subsequent wanderings of the first game's protagonist. In the sequel, you'll have access to the normal Big Daddy weapons (drill, rivet gun, Daddy Splash and Belly-Butt) and – in a twist that might make enthusiasts squirm – the ability to use plasmids.

The game will involve you capturing/rescuing Little Sisters from bad Big Daddies and, of most interest, from the newly introduced Big Sister, this being a lither, quicker and more deadly female version of you. Rapture is now ruled by this matriarch, intent on creating more creatures like her.

The game hasn't completely changed though. The much-maligned

We want in on those acid orgies.



Vita-Chambers will be back, in a sense. They won't be called Vita-Chambers, but the ability to regenerate in a very similar fashion will be in there. Splicers will still cause trouble, though we don't know if there will be any new types. You'd think there would be, but we can't confirm this at the time of writing.

We don't know what to make of all this. It seems that the game will be ditching some elements that made the

original so popular, concentrating more on combat than characterisation and atmosphere. The game is set 10 years after the original, so how many interesting people can there be to interact with? Correction – how many can there be that won't look like they've just been crowbarred in with little thought for the original's story? We'll just have to see what information appears in the next few months.

STOP PRESS!

STEAM WORKS!

Valve have said that Steamworks' new anti-piracy technology, Customer Executable Generation, will "make DRM obsolete". Let's hope it's true.

GAMESPY GETS DLCING

Gamespy is jumping on the DLC bandwagon. Its latest update will include *Direct2Game* – an engine for in-game stores and DLC providers.

LIVELY UP WINDOWS

Microsoft have added server-side authentication, piracy protection, and in-game stores to *Games for Windows – LIVE!*. We'll be testing it all out soon.

34

DEAD RODENTS

We put a set of gaming mice under the hammer. Literally.

42

STAR TREK ONLINE

The dream of a million Trekkers is coming true.

54

MAFIA II

An exclusive in-depth look at this grand sequel.

"Take my hand and it's off to Neverneverland."

"PHANTOM SUB" SPOTTED NEAR MIAMI

MIAMI - Reports of a mysterious "red light" in coastal waters that began in Europe have spread into the Caribbean and have now been sighted in the Keys and near Florida beaches. Some locals suspect that an enemy submarine is patrolling the waters. And some wonder if the crews are getting bolder and landing on shore.

PICTURES!!!! do they matter IRELAND? Miami beach lifeguard Frank Hoke, 23, told police about footprints in the sand the morning after a recent sighting. "They were big, with a heavy tread, like some kind of military boot," he observed. Retiree Robert Gorshin, 72, of Key West observed the red light from a pier one week ago. "It was headed due north," he claimed. "And we all know what lies south."

Gorshin, like many others, speculated that the unknown vessel may be of Cuban origin. "I'm not saying it's a Cuban," said Gorshin. "But I don't know what else makes sense."

p.28

GIRL VANISHES

POLICE QUESTION AU PAIR



La ROCHELLE - La Journée reports that a respected local couple's anniversary turned nightmarish when their young daughter went missing - and an untested au pair may be to blame.

Claude and Marie Dumas had gone out for dinner, leaving their daughter Camille, age 6, in the care of Lisette Dubois, a newly hired au pair. Dubois claims that when she stepped outside to have a cigarette, the girl simply disappeared from the bed she had been sleeping in peacefully only moments before.

Dubois suggests that the girl was pretending to sleep and took opportunity to run away. Police have not ruled out the theory and are currently holding Dubois for further questioning.

Now in stores: My Little Killing Machine.

GHOST LIGHTS

SPOOK CRUISE SHIP

JACKSONVILLE, FLA. - Underwater lights caused the Golden Queen to halt a pleasure cruise late last night in the mid-Atlantic as crewmen noticed a "red glowing thing" circling the ship at a rapid speed. After the light vanished, the captain consulted with Classic Cruise Lines' Florida Headquarters and the U.S. Coast Guard. The source of the mysterious light remains unknown.

Big Sister before the turn?

STUFF

Hope is at hand for Max Payne, after his image was tarnished by Marky Mark and assorted Hollywood executives. Rockstar Vancouver (not Remedy, who are still beaver away on *Alan Wake*) have been handed development duties for *Max Payne 3*. Max will be "a few years older, more world-weary and cynical than ever," according to Rockstar's Sam Houser. "We experience the downward spiral of his life after the events of *Max Payne 2* and witness his last chance for salvation." Could this be a series revival or a descent into cash-in sequel hell?

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER

GOOD TIMES

We're ahead of ourselves and things are looking rosy. Will it last?

Steve's back, the issue is in your hands, and we use the CDs to slaughter some PRs in a ritual sacrifice. Hurrah!

ON THE FENCE

Nope. Steve is told he's off to Prague to see *Mafia II* very near to our press deadline. Maybe it'll be OK...

While the team soldiers on, Steve is forced to cycle home from China, his bag full of bootleg Coldplay CDs.

BAD TIMES

Oh noes! We've lost Steve! He's somehow managed to board the wrong plane and he's ended up in Beijing!

IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

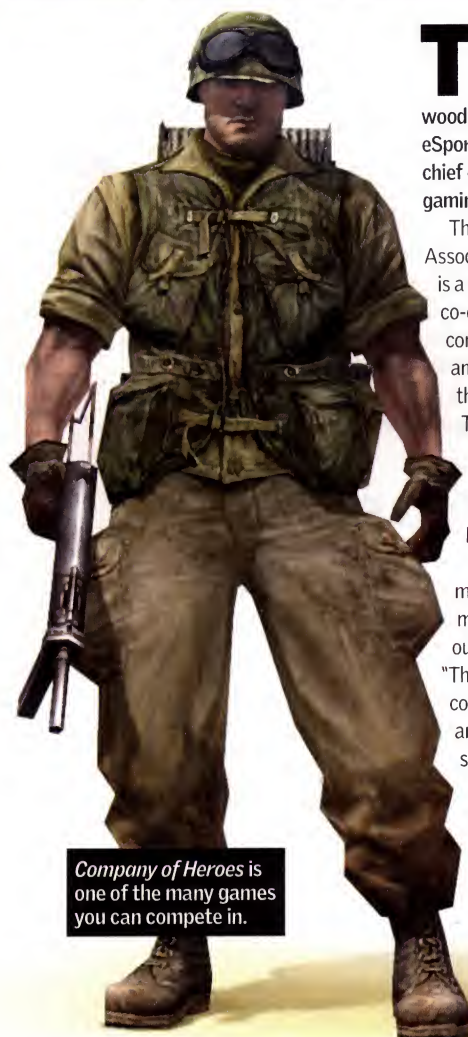
DEADLINE



LET'S GET PROFESSIONAL!

As UKeSA is set to change the face of professional gaming, *Ali Wood* thinks it's time for the pros to stand up

Team Dignitas' average age is not 10. Honestly.



Company of Heroes is one of the many games you can compete in.

THE UK'S PRO gamers need to get worried. "There are a lot more people coming out of the woodwork who are beating established eSports players," reveals Ray Mia, the chief exec of the UK's new professional gaming body.

The United Kingdom eSports Association (UKeSA, ukesa.org/ukesa) is a non-profit group which aims to co-ordinate government, industry and community efforts to encourage amateur and professional eSports in the UK – the FA, but for gamers. They've already been recognised as the governing body for professional gamers in the UK by the International eSports Federation.

"The UK is one of the largest markets, we're probably one of the most active gaming communities outside of the US," says Mia. "The question is, why hasn't anyone connected the dots? We looked at it and thought, if you've got a sustainable model, you can build it."

UKeSA have organised Europe's largest online tournaments, bringing together a wide community and just letting them play. Season 1 is well under way right now, and registration for Season 2 is fast approaching. However, Mia's not denying there have been

teething problems, but as a "champion of the gamer" he was keen to get the tournaments launched, get over any co-ordination issues, and focus on which games UKeSA can launch next, and how it can support existing communities.

GROWING THREATS

As a result of these tournaments the UK's pro gamers – teams like Crack Clan (www.crackclan.com) and Team Dignitas (team-dignitas.org) – are becoming more aware of each other, whereas before there were groups who only took part in certain tournaments run by certain companies, and the usual suspects of the major eSports teams.

Now these established teams are seeing they must raise their game because there are a lot more people looking to compete with them. And that includes Korean eSports associations who are looking at bringing the best of their players to play the best of the UK's.

UKeSA's tournaments are split into three different divisions. The Open Division is the amateur league. Anyone can play in this league for free, and every game with a workable online competitive multiplayer aspect is automatically included. So should teams wish to just play in this division, they can. *PC ZONE* is currently hosting several tournaments with games such as *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne*, *Company of Heroes* and *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, although these are expected to change for Season 2.

The popularity of games played here determine whether a game makes it to the next league: the Championship Division. This features a maximum of 14 games, and only teams with full squads



Play *Warcraft III* and earn money.





Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare is in UKeSA's Championship Division.

"Established teams are seeing they must raise their game because a lot more people are looking to compete"

can compete here. Each squad will be required to compete against every other one at least once. A team can have many squads or players in the Championship, but each player must pay a fee of £7.49 for each game they want to play in, every season.

Finally, there's the Premiership. This is an invite-only league for players who compete in the Championship Division to qualify, and be in with the chance of winning a slice of the league's prize fund.

The games will again be decided by popularity with a maximum of four titles in Season 1 although this may increase over time, and only eight teams will be allowed to compete in each game. To limit things even more,

a team can only have one squad in each game, and each squad is limited to just three players.

The Group stages of Season 1 will close by 11 May, with the semis and finals to take place at Earl's Court Two. There have been over 6,600 sign-ups, with the Open division attracting 4,600 players and the Championship Division boasting 2,000 people.

Full details of the divisions can be found at enemydown.eu/ukes – the home of UKeSA's leagues and cups.

MINING TALENT

If you think of the Open division like the FA Cup, you'll see amateurs taking on, and beating, the professionals, who'll go on to make real money, opening up the world of pro gaming like never before. And, unlike other LAN events which only ran for a short time – "the worst example I think was the World Series



Crack Clan are one of Europe's top teams. According to Crack Clan.

of Video Games," says Mia – UKeSA promise they're in it for the long run.

"We've set up a series of leagues and tournaments that are not going away, you can play as professionally or unprofessionally as you want," says Mia. "We know that people want to play online with their friends and they also want to play online with people they've never met before."

"We know that all we're doing is tapping into a rich vein of people who are playing games. The draw is that we're stitching that community together with another series of tournaments that aren't going away." However, UKeSA haven't been established to just run competitions. In answer to its critics who've said all it's doing is setting up leagues and tournaments, the association told us it's taking its responsibilities very seriously.

UKeSA have grass roots projects that they're developing with the Met, but a lot of what they're doing is in development. In the next two to three months UKeSA will begin working closely with the UK government and exploring how eSports can be used as a tool to help engagement between groups like employers, community groups, Safer Neighbourhood teams, and educational organisations.

WIN!

We've got five pairs of tickets up for grabs for the Season 1 UKeSA Grand Finals at Earl's Court Two. Simply answer the following question:

When did Earl's Court Two officially open?
A 1921 B 1971 C 1991

Head to www.futurecomps/ukes and follow the prompts to be in with a chance of winning. Visit snipurl.com/futuretcs for entry rules. Entries must be received by 12 May 2009.

Here is a highly-skilled cyberathlete at work.

GET INVOLVED

Think you're good enough for the pros?

Registration for UKeSA's Season 2 opens on 15 May and closes 19 June, with tournaments kicking off on 29 June.

The Season 2 Grand Final is scheduled to take place 29-31 August, Bank Holiday weekend. Head to enemydown.eu/ukes to sign up.

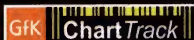
Is there anything you want PC ZONE to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ ali wood, pc zone,
 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by



- 1 **NEW** **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 94%
- 2 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009**
Issue 202 - 90%
- 3 **NEW** **TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.**
Issue 207 - 70%
- 4 **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II**
Issue 205 - 78%
- 5 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 6 **RE** **CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**
Issue 188 - 89%
- 7 **THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE**
N/A
- 8 **SPORE**
Issue 199 - 95%
- 9 **COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3**
Issue 201 - 86%
- 10 **F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN**
Issue 204 - 80%
- 11 **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
Issue 203 - 91%
- 12 **THE SIMS 2: APARTMENT LIFE**
N/A
- 13 **NEW** **EVE ONLINE**
Issue 130 - 80%
- 14 **NEW** **WORLD IN CONFLICT: COMPLETE EDITION**
N/A
- 15 **CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR**
Issue 202 - 84%
- 16 **FALLOUT 3**
Issue 201 - 91%
- 17 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLECHEST**
N/A
- 18 **LEFT 4 DEAD**
Issue 202 - 90%
- 19 **CSI: NEW YORK**
N/A
- 20 **NEW** **THE LAST REMNANT**
N/A

**1. EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**

The latest in the historical RTS series is the best yet. Creative Assembly have made a genuine genre-defining game.

**18. LEFT 4 DEAD**

The co-op zombie shooter is slowly falling down the charts. Will the *Survivor Pack* give it a boost?

**13. EVE ONLINE**

Being sold in the shops has given this five-year-old space-trading MMO its first appearance in the charts.

**19. CSI: NEW YORK**

We only review the best games around. We haven't reviewed this one. What does that tell you?



That's our Charlie Brooker on the left, with some other people.

**VALVE'S
BAFTA TRIUMPH**

Left 4 Dead scoops deserved award

WEBSITE bafta.org

VALVE'S LEFT 4 Dead is continuing to reap the rewards, this time earning a nice shiny gold face by winning the Multiplayer BAFTA games award, beating both *Gears of War 2* and *Call of Duty 4*, along with *Rock Band*, *Mario Kart Wii* and *Buzz! Quiz TV*.

The awards were hosted by *Mock The Week*'s Dara O Briain, with the likes of 'our' Charlie Brooker, Jonathan Ross, Danny Wallace, Alex Zane and erm, Konnie Huq all handing out gongs. Comic O Briain labelled these times as a

"Golden Age" for video games, with other winners on the night including EA Montreal, which scooped the Technical Achievement award for *Spore*.

Infinity Ward racked up the most accolades for *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, which earned two BAFTAs for Gameplay, and Story And Character, and the public's choice by winning the GAME Award of 2008.

The coveted BAFTA Fellowship went to Nolan Bushnell, inventor of *Pong* and founder of Atari.

FEAR IS GOOD
Scientists confirm our suspicions

WEBSITE frankfuredi.com

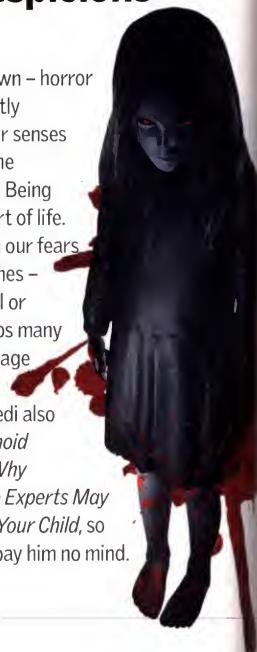
OVER 70% OF 18 to 30-year-olds have admitted they like to be scared by playing games. And it's not just the young 'uns either, as around 60% of 36 to 40-year-olds also confirmed they see being scared as a form of entertainment.

Frank Furedi, professor of sociology at the University of Kent and author of *The Culture of Fear* said: "Paradoxically although fear is part of our everyday experience, many of us welcome the opportunity to feel a little bit scared.

"In a risk-averse age many of us have a very human aspiration to find out how we react in scary circumstances. In contrast to our routine fears – health, economic insecurity, relationships

breaking down – horror games directly stimulate our senses and excite the imagination. Being scared is part of life. Playing with our fears – through games – conventional or digital – helps many of us to manage them."

Prof Furedi also wrote *Paranoid Parenting: Why Ignoring the Experts May Be Best for Your Child*, so feel free to pay him no mind.



R.U.S.E. YOUR ILLUSION

This one is for devious bastards only

WEBSITE ubi.com/uk

UBISOFT HAVE ANNOUNCED

R.U.S.E., a new WWII RTS game which the developers are describing as a "breakthrough in strategy". The game's IrisZoom engine can display a mind-shattering 1 billion polygons on screen at once, and it looks like an improved version of the *Supreme Commander* system.

The game is all about the art of deception, as Mathieu Girard, a producer at Ubisoft, tells us: "The deception abilities are split into three categories: ones which hide information; ones which create false information, like deploying fake units or making heavy tanks look like light ones; and finally one where you steal information, so you can learn your enemy's plans, identify his hidden units, and so on."

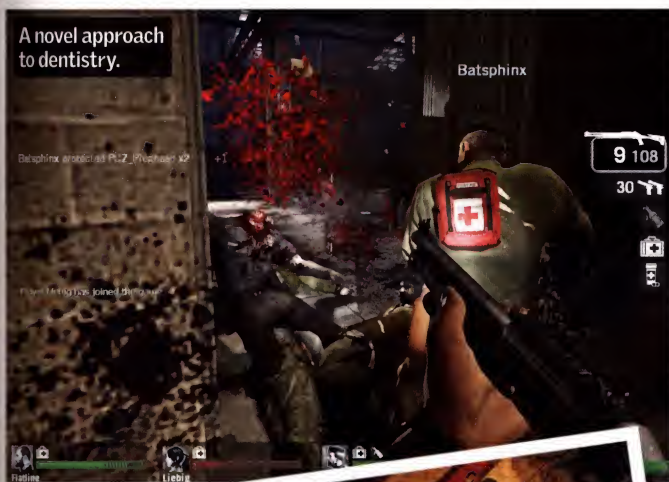
"The game promotes dirty tricks, like attacking the supply lines to weaken an enemy, hiding in the forests and preparing an ambush. There's a lot of scope for this sort of fighting, which is exciting."

The game will also give you plenty of space to implement your ruthless tactics, bringing some of, if not the biggest battle maps we've ever seen in RTS gaming. When they say 1 billion polygons, you can definitely believe them. We've only seen two maps so far, but even the small one is huge in scale.

R.U.S.E. is definitely a game we will keep an eye on as the year progresses, as the potential for tactical play and devious strategic scheming is too great to ignore. More as and when we get it.



A man with no teeth wields a cauliflower.



SURVIVOR SERIES

Left 4 Dead finally gets a boost

WEBSITE l4d.com

LET'S FACE IT, it has been too bloody long coming. *Left 4 Dead* was released on 18 November and now – five months later – we are finally getting new material for it.

Usually it wouldn't be a problem, but Valve's *L4D* is one of those games that desperately needed a regular influx of new material. There were only four campaigns (and only two available to the Versus mode), and there was no way this was going to keep everybody interested for such a long time. And

sure enough, player numbers are down substantially and most people are utterly sick of playing Versus mode on No Mercy and Blood Harvest.

Thankfully, the day is almost upon us. The *Survival Pack* allows Dead Air and Death Toll to be played in Versus, and there's the eagerly anticipated Survival mode. This new play style gives the survivors a period of time to prepare before waves of the infected attack. The situation is completely unwinnable, so the aim is just to survive for as long as possible.

Perhaps the most important addition is the SDK, which will allow the modding community to regale us with more of their brilliant (and, in most cases, terrible) creations.

The pack is currently scheduled for release on 21 April. Let's hope this hasn't been pushed back or changed after we've gone to press.



THE SIMCITY KILLER?

CITIES XL

"Is this the end of EA's franchise?" asks David Brown

DEVELOPER Monte Cristo PUBLISHER Monte Cristo WEBSITE citiesxl.com

OFTEN WHEN YOU hear about a title made by a small European developer, the temptation is to dismiss it when you've got 20 or so big-budget games cluttering up your desk. But not this time.

For those who are unaware, *Cities XL* is the first proper attempt to take a city building game to the internet, providing an online multiplayer mode, as well as the traditional single-player, that'll encompass the best features of the genre, plus a whole realm of social networking and co-operation.

The game pans out as you'd expect – lay down residential, industrial and commercial zones, along with a veritable bounty of more unusual ones – and watch your city grow.

The biggest difference is in the scale. Each map is huge and will take weeks of dedicated play to fill up. I was shown a "here's one we made earlier" settlement

and it was easily as big as one from any other city builder. The camera zoomed out and it only covered a third of the map. As in Monte Cristo's previous city games (*City Life*, for example) you can zoom all the way in, watching your citizens go about their daily business.

WORLD OF CITIES

Despite the size of *Cities XL*'s play area, it's genuinely easy to start playing. A problem for other city builders is that they can be intimidating when you first start. You have so many demands to fulfil and inaccessible economic and civic screens crop up all over the place, swamping you. *Cities XL* has all these things, but they are presented in a way that doesn't feel like you're being forced – a ludicrous amount of stats.

Monte Cristo have worked hard to make the interface as user-friendly as possible. Within seconds I was creating a settlement that impressed those watching, even if my triangular fruit farm drew bemused stares.

The scope is difficult to convey in such a short space, but when I say that its gameplay extension modules

CARING AND SHARING
Send your cities into the world

Cities XL's multiplayer takes the form of an MMO, just with cities to build instead of repetitive and generic monsters to slaughter.

Servers will take the form of worlds, where hundreds of people will go to build their cities. Co-operation is the name of the game so if your city has a shortage of workers, you can trade with other players to import them, in exchange for raw materials of your own. Real-world buildings like the Eiffel Tower, the Chrysler Building can also be built, but need so many resources you'll need to work with other people to do so.

We don't know if this style of MMO will catch on, but if it does, *Cities XL* could be a massive hit.

(GEMs) system allows Monte Cristo to seamlessly add in whole new *Tycoon* game-style elements. There are two GEMs included in the full game, at the time of writing: a beach module and a ski resort. The observant among you will have seen plenty of ski or beach *Tycoon* games that will have less material than *Cities XL*'s GEMs. It's like gluing a whole new title onto one that is already huge as it is. You can have numerous cities on the go at once, so don't think you'll have to stick them all

on one map. You just need to have the correct terrain and you can build any of the GEM buildings in your existing cities, or you can start a new one.

I've barely scratched the surface, but you can probably tell *Cities XL* is an exciting prospect. With a Facebook-style multiplayer section, it could be huge. The question is whether people will take to it, but as there are no real competitors out there (unless Maxis release a *SimCity* MMO) it wouldn't surprise us if it did. **PC7**



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Ambitious
- ✓ Multiplayer city building
- ✓ Huge in scale
- ✓ Easy to play
- ✓ Difficult to master
- ✗ Lacking public appeal?





"Are you troubled by strange noises in the middle of the night?"



Egon's hair is the best thing in the game...



...apart from Stay-Puft himself.

TIME TO SLIME...

GHOSTBUSTERS

Rookie 'buster **David Brown** goes after Casper

DEVELOPER Terminal Reality PUBLISHER Atari WEBSITE ghostbustersgame.com

THERE ARE FEW franchises that are as beloved by so many as *Ghostbusters* and few songs as iconic as Ray Parker Jr's theme song. We got a chance to briefly play with Terminal Reality's new game and the results were interesting, to say the least. While we're not going to get too excited just yet, we did witness some promising signs.

"Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis are penning the script"

First of all, there's the atmosphere created by the presence of the original cast members supplying their voices. To say this adds immeasurably to the atmosphere would be playing it down substantially. Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis are penning the script, which adds

another layer of authenticity to the gameplay. So this isn't just some jobber trying to copy the feel of the films, it's almost like *Ghostbusters* is a proper follow-up to the second film.

The game itself is setting itself up as a third-person action game, with you playing a rookie fifth member of the team. We started off in an office block, where we had to use our EPK meters to

detect the presence of spooks. Once discovered, a swarm of marshmallow dogs (well they looked a bit like dogs) spawned by Mr Stay-Puft attacked us.

The missions we've been privy to have yourself and one of the real Ghostbusters working together, in this case, Ray Stantz. Just like in many shooters, AI-run characters in *Ghostbusters* get knocked out very easily and you have to keep reviving them. The actual gameplay didn't seem to be pushing any boundaries either, although we're fully prepared to admit we only got a limited feel for the game. Having said that, the levels we

played involved a lot of enemies swarming and some repetitive action.

When you come up against a more powerful ghost or demon, you have to fix it in your capture stream, throw out a trap and pull it down into the container. There'll also be multiplayer, with four players teaming up on various levels based on iconic moments in the movies. This sounds like it could be great fun, but there won't be any campaign co-op. What will be included are a number of experimental weapons such as the slime tether, which can be used to manipulate the environment (you shoot a slime 'rope' at an object and then tug it towards you).

Terminal Reality, as with other recent games, are going with a HUD-less display, with information being displayed on the back of your character's proton pack, like in *Dead Space*.

We're still excited by *Ghostbusters*, but this has been tempered slightly by the repetitive combat. Having said that, the rest of the game looks interesting, so we'd be fools to write it off at this time. It's been a long time coming, so we're willing to give the game every chance to prove itself. Just don't let us down, Terminal Reality! **PC1**



THE STORY SO FAR... TERMINAL REALITY

FLY!
Terminal Reality's first big game. It had air traffic control bits.



1999



NOCTURNE
Was rock-bollocking hard, scary, and utterly, utterly fantastic.

1999

BLOODRAYNE
Nudity, woeful movies, and two OK games, all about a sexy dhampir.



2002



GHOSTBUSTERS
Egon, Peter, Winston and Ray return to our screens later this year!

2009

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Authentic
- ✓ Atmospheric
- ✓ Original actors onboard
- ✗ Repetitive combat



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12

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GOA

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MYTHIC
ENTERTAINMENT

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1



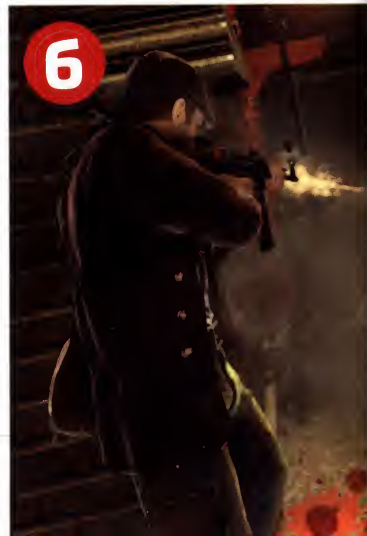
THE SABOTEUR

DEVELOPER Pandemic PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE pandemicstudios.com/saboteur ETA Summer 2009

THE LAST TIME we heard anything about this action/stealth extravaganza was two years ago. Since then, Pandemic have made *Lord of the Rings: Conquest* and *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames*, so as *The Saboteur*'s release approaches we're hoping it'll reverse Pandemic's trend of rather shoddy releases.

What we're seeing of *The Saboteur* now reminds us a little of *Velvet Assassin*. So if that game has been sewing the seeds of gaming lust in your bosom, then maybe *The Saboteur* will also be right up your alley. Although a game about an Irishman planting bombs in the name of freedom might not be the ideal basis for a plot in the current political climate.

6



2



THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. TECHNICAL ECSTASY

The game is being built on Pandemic's new proprietary graphics and game engines, *Odin* and *Wildstar*. We're hoping this will signify a new start for their games after some recent failures.

2. NEVER SAY DIE!

You play an Irish man, Sean, who is living in Nazi-occupied Paris during WWII. After witnessing a number of atrocities, Sean finds himself unable to remain neutral any longer, and starts to fight the Nazis.

3. SABOTAGE

To achieve his goals, Sean gets stuck into the Nazis with bombs, grenades and other explosive devices, generally trying to cause as much trouble as possible and drive off the occupying forces. Politically correct, it ain't.

4. MASTER OF REALITY

The placing of this explosive is a positive action of resistance, so the bleak greyness of the area is affected by colour. Think of your character as the Tony Hart of WWII, bringing colour and hope to the lives of the people.

5. HEAVEN AND HELL

One of the game's core concepts is Will To Fight, where neighbourhoods are colour-coded depending on their revolutionary sentiment. Grey areas are despondent, while colourful ones are full of people eager to fight against the Nazis.

6. VOLUME 4

The game is set in what Pandemic calls "a blockbuster open-world gaming experience, full of weapons, vehicles, missions and action." We're sure there'll be some stealth in there too.

3



4



5



PASS THE SPITTOON...

CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD

How the West was won and where it got *David Brown*

DEVELOPER Techland PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE callofjuarezgame.com

BACK IN 2007 *Call of Juarez* split opinion, and it's fair to say the majority came down on the side of the naysayers. However, this writer was one of those who saw beauty in the occasionally flawed facade of Techland's Wild West epic. Sure, there were problems, but Techland had tried something very few others had done before and managed to succeed, generally, in producing a quality game. One with a few issues.

These problems have been paramount in the minds of the bods at Techland and the sequel promises to address all of the quibbles raised by fans of the original, including the issue of having an annoying kid as one of the main characters.

"At the beginning of the process, we were talking about the elements we recognised as being controversial in the first game," says Thomas Lerouz-Hugon, a Ubisoft spokesperson. "Some parts were almost universally disliked by the fans, such as Billy, stealth, platforming, and physics puzzles. The fans didn't like those parts very much, so what Techland are doing now is focusing on the game

mechanics, the core elements of a Wild West shooter, removing the things that people didn't like. However, we still want to maintain a sense of diversity as the setting is so open and there are so many things to do."

BROTHERS GRIM

So, instead of Billy (the whip-carrying brat) we have Thomas McCall, sibling to Brother Ray, the Bible-wielding preacher-cum-gunslinger from *Juarez*. *Bound in Blood* is a prequel and Ray isn't yet a man of God, so their story deals, among other things, with the events leading up to Ray's taking up the cloth. The start is set in the American Civil War, with the brothers taking up arms to defend the South from the Yankees and their slave-freeing ideas. From here, things change, decisions need to be made and the brothers meet the people who shape their destiny.

The relationship between the two protagonists is at the core of the plot and the gameplay. They must work together to get through the levels, each having unique abilities. Thomas is more nimble, able to clamber onto buildings and take the higher ground, from where he can use a rifle to pick off enemies. He also has the ability to quick-draw his pistol, like classic Western shooters of yore. Ray is the tank of the two, wearing a chest plate like Clint Eastwood in *A Fistful of Dollars*, plus he can use a concentration

mode to launch a blitz-like spray of bullets at groups of targets.

Those of you who have played the original will know that it hasn't just passed the test of time – it's ruthlessly beat it into submission. The DirectX 10 version is gorgeous, with all the bells and whistles you could think of being bolted onto the already luscious Chrome engine.

ETA
SUMMER
2009

THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ More combat-oriented
- ✔ No Billy
- ✔ No mountain climbing
- ✔ Interesting setting
- ✔ Still looks great
- ✗ Will people take to it?



THE STORY SO FAR... TECHLAND



PET SOCCER

This ballbag of a game was laughable at best.

2001



CHROME

Things got better, but this game wasn't as good as people hoped.

2003



CALL OF JUAREZ

Despite problems, this remains a Western classic.

2006

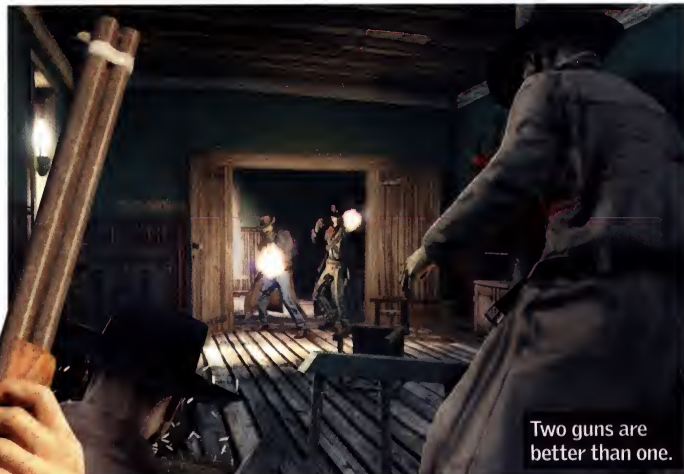


THE FUTURE

On the cards: *Bound in Blood*, *Chrome 2*, *Dead Island* and *Warhound*.

2009-10

The Brothers McCall: Ray on the left, Thomas on the right.



Two guns are better than one.

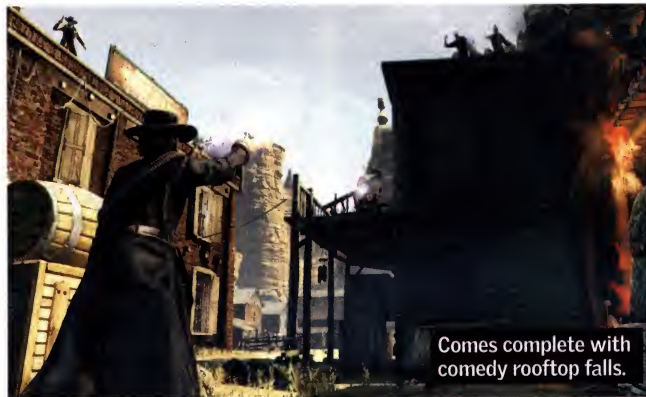
DEATHMATCH AT THE O.K. CORRAL

Multiplayer options for budding banditos

Call of Juarez had decent multiplayer modes, but they were largely ignored by the public. Techland are hoping this doesn't happen with *Bound in Blood* and have included some interesting ideas to tempt potential players.

The most exciting of these is the Famous Events mode, where you can

re-enact iconic scenes in Western folklore. There's also a Bounty mode, with one player being hunted by the others – similar to *AvP's* Predator vs Humans option. This one can also be done in teams, so the player with the bounty on his head will be protected by his comrades – similar to *Counter-Strike's* VIP mode.



Comes complete with comedy rooftop falls.

"Whoops! Butterfingers!"

Bound in Blood starts in the US Civil War.

Bound in Blood will feature the engine's fourth iteration, but it doesn't look spectacularly different to the first game's, which might be because that one has been upgraded significantly and so the differences are difficult to spot. This doesn't matter too much though, as it still looks spot on. Settlements still look how you expect them to and the countryside is still lush with vegetation and wildlife. Birds swoop through the air in the wilderness and chickens waddle around the towns. And yes, you can

shoot them – there's even an achievement for doing so.

The gameplay itself is along similar lines to the first game, with the emphasis more on

gunfights and action. In what might be a worrying sign of the game being overly console-y, there's an automatic cover system, where moving towards certain obstacles and walls puts you straight into a lean mode. Hopefully this'll feel natural, but the temptation is to think it will force you into cover when you don't want to be in it. There is also the spreading cancer of regenerating health, where you can take a stupid number of hits, then hide behind a rock and miraculously emerge seconds later unscathed.

Still, nods to our pad-grasping cousins aside, we're confident this will be an even more triumphant entry into the criminally neglected genre that is the Wild West game. Techland have proved they can do it, they just need to make sure the unbelievers get the message as well. So says Brother Ray. **PCZ**

BATTLING DEITIES...**DEMIGOD**

To prove his hardness, **Ed Zitron** picks a fight with a pantheon.

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games PUBLISHER Atari WEBSITE demigodthegame.com

AS TIME ROLLS on, we see a large number of old concepts rehashed into piss-poor new games. This makes *Demigod* an anomaly. Rather than being based on a previous hit, the wealth of its ideas come straight from the *WarCraft III* mod, *Defense of the Ancients*. In both, you control a main unit (in this case a demigod) that has special powers, gains levels, and controls a smaller group of minions that do its bidding, much like an RTS.

Your demigod is where things differ from your average clicky war-maker. As the games progress – they last anywhere between 15 and 60 minutes – your pseudo-diet gains experience and adds skills to a tree of different abilities and upgrades. You can equip him (or her) with armour, weapons and trinkets that add different effects, like life-stealing or electrocution, to your weapons.

EASY TO BE A GOD

Now, if this all seems rather confusing, that's because it is – *Demigod* is an utterly bizarre and bewildering experience at first. You have to learn to play the game half like an RTS – ordering units, capturing defensive structures, and attacking buildings – and half like an RPG. You'll be buying items, healing allies, leveling up and tapping hotkeys to

slam through hordes of smaller enemies and other demigods.

At first you'll find yourself frustratingly creamed against the cobblestones by more experienced players as you try to learn the ropes. Online gameplay is brutal – especially given how many players have developed their skills in *Defense of the Ancients*.

God-like tacticians will flank your demigod, levelling faster than you can imagine and killing you before you can blink. The good news is that *Demigod* has its own single-player campaign, and allows you to play RTS-esque AI-only skirmishes to learn the ropes. That, and death isn't terribly penalised in most games, losing you a bit of experience and 25 seconds of your life.

Once you have the guts to battle against real people, you can venture online and enter the Pantheon (see

ETA
**24 APRIL
2009**



'The Pantheon'), which was still somewhat work-in-progress during our hands-on, but for the most part succeeded in creating good match-ups. Sadly, *Demigod* suffers in the same way other team-oriented online games do: a shit group makes for frustrating play. That, and the current Pantheon only

matches you at random, making it hard to build a reliable team.

The upshot is that a good match of *Demigod* is astoundingly addictive and tense. Conquest (destroy their citadel), Dominate (*Dawn of War*-style map-conquering), Dominate (demigod deathmatch) and Fortress (destroy their towers, walls and forts) games rely on

THE PANTHEON

One big, unhappy family



Demigod's Pantheon is a gigantic online tournament, theoretically played by thousands, with each side vying to score points through kills (both minions and demigods), captures and wins.

Clans form and battle other top-ranked bozos on either side, and the war is pushed in favour of the forces of Light or Darkness. You choose a side, which stays with your account, and every battle adds a persistent total to your personal history and for the war effort. Each side pushes towards a point goal that, when reached, crowns them the winner of the tournament.

This is a devious way of convincing people to constantly play, if only to know that they've pushed their side to victory again and again over their enemies. The only issue could be the balance of the side, with more players (as it was in the beta) playing for the fancy-dancing Light side as opposed to the moody, bearded and dark-armoured Darkness.

Gas Powered Games and Impulse have pledged to work out the intricacies of the system's balance, so we'll wait and see what happens when *Demigod* goes live.



It's the Ugliers vs the Fuglies.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ DOTA formula is well-realised
- ✓ Strangely addictive
- ✓ Deep multiplayer
- ✗ Ultimately, it's DOTA
- ✗ Can be overwhelming online

THE STORY SO FAR... GAS POWERED GAMES



INDIFFERENCE
The world shrugs as
Dungeon Siege tries
to be the new *Diablo*.

2002



PERSISTENCE
GPG try again with
Dungeon Siege II.
A few people smile.

2005



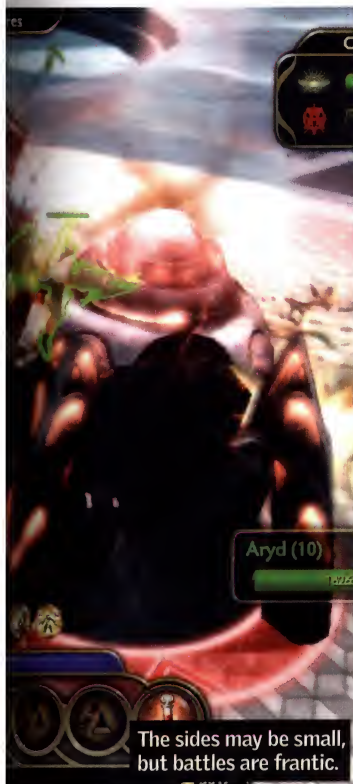
VIOLENCE
GPG create *Supreme
Commander*. People
are impressed.

2007



DEFENCE
Critics savage *Space
Siege*, but we clutch
it to our bosom.

2008



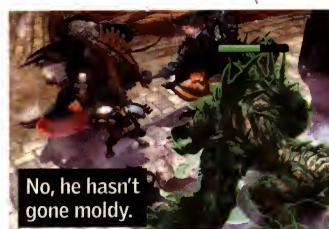
The sides may be small,
but battles are frantic.



"Be with you in a sec.
I'm having a breather."



Hey, weren't
you in Brazil?



No, he hasn't
gone moldy.



You're about to have
your wings clipped.



Where's the
rest of him?

remarkably different tactics, and a true battle of wits can be painfully enjoyable. As much as a dumb-arse can ruin your experience, teaming up with better players makes *Demigod* addictive. A well-timed bait-and-switch operation that lets you take the flag by the enemy's artifact shop is up there with a perfect headshot.

The demigods themselves are varied enough to cater for most play styles without overwhelming you with choice. That, and you're able to play as a gigantic

walking castle that can install archers and lasers on its shoulders.

The beauty of *Demigod* is how each demigod handles and levels up. The game has the well-tuned customisation of an RPG without the persistence, and the tight tuning and epic action of the first *Dawn of War*. Centring the experience on at most four units makes for a deep experience, while choosing the different parts of the skill tree before each match feels like *Counter-Strike*.

Demigod has all the makings of an online masterpiece. Getting the hang of things takes a fair few games, but once you're comfortable with one particular demigod, the experience becomes more about the tactical choice of skills, items and controlling the map. The game relies on and rewards you for using many different gaming skills, and graphically produces some epic and satisfying moments – beating *Defense of the Ancients*'s dated look.

The question now is whether people are willing to deal with Stardock's somewhat awkward Impulse service,

and whether the Pantheon mode will become any more robust.

TUNING TO GO

This hands-on was on the game's beta servers, and the Pantheon tournaments were in need of tweaking – both in balance and matchmaking. Necessary additions like friends lists and grouping are currently somewhat wonky, and without them working in top form, the final product could feel incomplete.

Ultimately, the core of *Demigod* is fantastic with a very, very promising multiplayer side. Whether or not Gas Powered Games learn some of the valuable lessons taught by online gaming on both consoles and PCs remains to be seen. **PCZ**

**"You have to learn to play the game half like
a real-time strategy title and half like an RPG"**

RIGHT TO PLAY

RIGHT TO PLAY

ON THE SIDELINES...

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2009

Donning an anorak *David Brown* gets ready to order men in shorts about

DEVELOPER Beautiful Game Studios PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE championshipmanager.co.uk PREVIOUSLY IN... 204

ETA
**SUMMER
2009**

I'VE BEEN WAITING for it for so long and, finally, a football management game is coming with a weather/climate model that visibly affects the game. While *Football Manager* has simulated weather effects, it rarely affects the look of the pitch. *Championship Manager 2009* is changing that. Play in the depths of winter and the snow will roll out. A bit of a rainstorm and the pitch churns up into a mud bath. It's about bloody time is all I have to say.

Of course, you'll want to hear about what other new things are coming to the *Champ Man* experience, other than snowflakes falling on your players during a match. As nerdily exciting to me as the weather effects are, they won't make up for sloppy match engine design and a lack of real depth. Luckily,

it's looking like *CM09* is shaping up pretty well in those regards too. We showed some of its more overarching elements in issue 204, but since then some new features have been added or tweaked.

TACTICAL TWEAKS

Paramount among these is the setpiece editor, which allows you to fully customise and develop all your own corners, plus attacking and defensive free kicks. Each one has five phases, defined by the ball being kicked. With this in mind, I started a new game as Kashima Antlers in Japan (the J-League will be in *CM09*, something that cannot be said of *FM*, trivia fans) and, after picking a team, taking a look at the squad and being bemused by the fact I had at least 10 first team central midfielders, I set about having a look at just how powerful the editor is.

Each setpiece presents you with a cut-out of the area it takes place in, so attacking free kicks give you the opposition's third of the pitch to



interact with. You drag your men over onto the pitch and arrange them however you want them to be at the beginning. You can assign runs and tell the free kick taker which player to pass it to (or just tell him to blast it, if you don't want to use your imagination). Once you've assigned a pass or cross, you can set up the next phase, which

means you can tell the receiving player what to do with it once he gets it. If you played it out to the right winger, he can then be told to cross it into the box for a striker, who you might have set to run in from deep, to nod it in. Each setpiece can be as complicated as you like, with every player on your team making darting runs or just having your setpiece specialist punt it into the box, hoping for a bit of luck.

SCOUTING FOR BOYS

The other main thing Beautiful Game Studios have snuck into the game is a revamped scouting system. Usually when companies say something has been revamped, they've perhaps changed the skin and tweaked a couple of minor settings, but this time BGS have actually completely changed the way scouting works. Think of your scouting as less of a look-through-a-big-list type of thing and more of a regional/national idea.

Essentially you have access to a map of each continent and you can



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Customisable setpieces
- ✓ Scouting network
- ✓ Match engine shaping up
- ✓ Accessible interface
- ✓ Weather!
- ✗ Some bugs still to iron out
- ✗ Will people abandon *FM*?



THE STORY SO FAR... BITTER RIVALS



**PREMIER
MANAGER**
The old ones were fun,
the new ones are bum.

1992



FIFA MAN 2009
For those who want
The Sims mixed with
their management.

OCT 2008



FM 2009
The big boy in the
genre, isn't taking
prisoners.

NOV 2008



CHAMP MAN 09
Eidos and BGS have
high hopes for this
one, as do we.

SOON

RIGHT TO PLAY

Reading
18th in Championship

20:12 Fri 04-07-08

Club Fixtures

Team	Date	Time	Competition
Stockport	Fri, 04.07.2008	19:00	A
Man Utd	Mon, 07.07.2008	19:00	H
Macclesfield	Wed, 09.07.2008	19:00	A
Bury	Wed, 16.07.2008	19:00	H

Set-Pieces

Use	Set-Piece Name	Status	When to Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free Kick Central	complete	Normal
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free Kick Central	complete	Normal
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free Kick Central	complete	Normal
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free Kick Central	complete	Normal
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free Kick Central	complete	Normal
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free Kick Left	complete	Normal

Steps

- Noel Hunt - None
- Noel Hunt - Pass
- Kevin Doyle - Shoot

The setpiece creation tool is a time sink.

The excitement of progress bars.

Play out training moves in the match engine.

assign a certain amount of funding (taken from your wage budget) to establishing a network of scouts in that country. So I would, for example, head straight to South America and assign as much as I was allowed to Brazil, Argentina and Peru (the latter for sentimental reasons). Over time, an increasing number of players are revealed to you. This doesn't mean you can't look for players manually, but the flaw with this is that a player from a nation you know nothing about will have his stats reported in a vague way.

If you decide to take a gamble on someone, you could find his alleged finishing of 100% (player abilities are done out of 100 in *CM09*) is actually 50%. So without the proper research you could try to buy a Jamie Carragher and end up with a Djimi Traore. This isn't always a bad thing – a youngster who's worse than you expected could turn into the next Igor Biscan or Sean Dundee. Obviously we can't tell if youth development is effective yet, but if

CHANT DOWN BABYLON

BGS plan to add atmosphere with chant packs

Let's face it, nobody really buys a football management game for the electric atmosphere. The exciting moments often come from your own interaction with the game, your own imagination projected onto the text/blobs/players on the screen. But Beautiful Game Studios are aiming to change that slightly with chant packs: downloadable crowd noises for different teams.

Chants would only be made available for the biggest teams, but BGS say that it will be entirely possible for users to create their own for the smaller clubs.

A lot of people will probably either ignore this or just turn the sound off as soon as they load up the game, but listening to the crowd sing *You'll Never Walk Alone* before a Liverpool match will definitely add to the experience, however minutely.



BGS can nail it, they'll win over many hardcore players.

The build we tested was far from complete, but even then it played a decent game of football. While there are issues to iron out (scores were high across the board, plus there were a few too many defensive lapses) this could be the first time *Football Manager* faces a challenge to its title as the best soccer spreadsheet. **PEZ**

"Without the proper research you could try to buy a Jamie Carragher and end up with a Djimi Traore"

Alan Latchley (Reading)
Manager, English, Age 36

Scouting Network

1045 Fri 04-07-08

Competition Winners

Competition	Winner
Championship	West Bromwich Albion (P...)
Premier Division	Manchester United
League One	Sheff...

Legend

Knowledge	Current Region
None	Current Region Knowledge
Poor	Wage Budget Remaining (Per W...)
Average	Current Region Scouting Invest...
Good	Total Scouting Network Investment (per week)

Nations change colour as your scouting network improves.

PC Specialist recommends Windows Vista™ Home Premium

 **pcspecialist.co.uk**

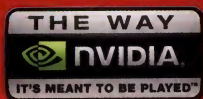


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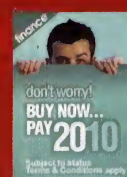
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SURVIVORS...
SMASH MY
MOUSE UP!

Three gaming mice. Three ruthless tests of endurance. Which will come out on top? Or at least in working order? It's time for the stress test of the decade...

NERD RAGE CAN be a destructive thing. It cracks like a whip, fleeting like a startled cat of anger, gone before your brain can retaliate with your typically cold and calculated responses to life's encounters. When *Quake Live* loses its connection for the 50th time, it's the objects closest to you that bear the brunt of your seething outbursts – your keyboard, your mouse, and in a few extreme

cases the monitor (if you're the thoughtless, punching sort).

In the interest of Science™, we've taken three of our favourite gaming mice and exposed them to our mightiest, nerdiest tantrums. Without excessive ado, here's our heroic line-up...



"Out of respect we ceased our attacks. This mouse was a goner, but it left a beautiful corpse"

It might still work...

THE GUINEA PIGS

Rodents who volunteered for this suicide mission



RAZER DEATHADDER

Though some accuse the DeathAdder of being plain, we appreciate the sleekness of Razer's design. It's not as featured-bloated as the other mice in our line-up, and doesn't weigh as much as its peers, but it's certainly the classiest. The DeathAdder also uses an infrared laser instead of the conventional red laser, which means it's invisible! The laser, not the mouse.

OUR FAVOURITE BIT

ALI: "That infrared laser really is something, isn't it? You can look right into the bottom of the mouse without fear of retinal damage. I think."



LOGITECH G5 LASER

A tactical inclusion from Logitech – when we mentioned the sort of trials their peripheral would face, they nodded to one another and submitted the G5. We can see why, the G5 is a straightforward bit of kit – not much fluff aside from a removable tray of weights, nicely molded, with some functional and down-to-earth features. This is a man's mouse.

OUR FAVOURITE BIT

DAVID: "Removable weights are a bit of a gimmick, but I love the noise the tray makes when it clicks in. Snikt! Love it! Snikt!"

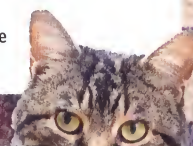


SAITEK CYBORG

Easily the most complicated looking of our line-up, the Saitek Cyborg features some wide-ranging adjustability. The entire arse of the thing can be moved forwards and back with little whirring motors, the mouse wheel's strength can be adjusted, and there's a secret, low-profile hat switch (that's a D-pad, to you and me) hidden under where your thumb goes.

OUR FAVORITE BIT

STEVE: "It's gotta be that adjustable rear segment. Perfect for people whose hands are constantly changing size."



SMASH TEST ONE FULL BODY DESK SLAM

To determine the effects of angry desk slammage on our mice, they were gripped firmly in the right hand, and a heavy, enraged slam was abruptly delivered to the mouse... a couple of dozen times for each one.



SAITEK CYBORG ★★★★★

BEFORE: We've a few concerns about the Saitek Cyborg. It's a very angular, sci-fi mouse with lots of jutting out bits. Even when the mouse is stationary these outcrops look ready to fly off and embed themselves in your eye, so during this test, we're fearing for our lives.

AFTER: The Cyborg did well at first, but within a few slams a big crack shot across the adjustable back-end, before the plastic came clean off, taking the side-casing and the low-profile hat-switch. Oh dear. Still, the bits went back on, mostly, and the most important buttons still worked.



LOGITECH G5 LASER ★★★★★

BEFORE: Who can predict how the G5 will perform in a series of desk slam tests? Our independent adjudicator stands by to ensure the tests are properly carried out, but in our hands and in our hearts we feel the G5 will take any punishment we dish out. Logitech's mouse feels solid, readers, solid as a rock.

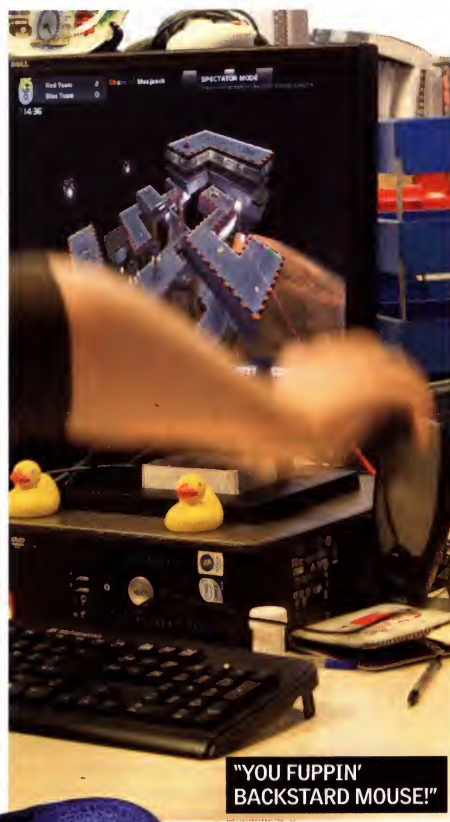
AFTER: The first slam unleashed a surprise. A hitherto forgotten tray of weights shot out, causing 4.5g bullets to whizz across the office – the mouse had retaliated! Luckily for our ongoing employment, no-one was injured. Further slams gave no further surprises, and the G5 was left unscathed.



RAZER DEATHADDER ★★★★★

BEFORE: With fewer component parts than its peers we think the DeathAdder is far less likely to disintegrate in the same way the Cyborg did, and its entire upper layer (from its back to its buttons) is made of a single piece of molded plastic. This mouse will be left broken or unbroken.

AFTER: A couple of slams in and the right mouse button popped up. Subsequent slams destroying the internals, rendering both buttons useless. It also began emitting a melancholic rattle. Out of respect we ceased our attacks. This mouse was a goner, but it left a beautiful corpse.



"YOU FUPPIN' BACKSTARD MOUSE!"

Disclaimer: not for use as suicide instructions.



SMASH TEST TWO THROWN FROM A ROOFTOP

Living in an apartment is fraught with danger, not least of which is hurling your mouse from your rooftop terrace to the street below. To emulate this rare form of nerd rage, we dropped our mice from the roof of Zone Towers.



SAITEK CYBORG ★★★★★

BEFORE: From the top of our offices we've got 100ft of air to play with. Dropped from this height the Cyborg will reach a speed of roughly 60mph before making contact with the pavement. That's 90 feet per second – not even close to terminal velocity, but terminal enough for our experiments.

AFTER: The post-impact examination revealed a great deal of trauma. The buttons shot off at awkward angles, now entirely useless. The adjustable back-end snapped entirely off, irreparably. Plugging it in yields no response from the PC or the unfortunate mouse. The Cyborg is dead.



LOGITECH G5 LASER ★★★★★

BEFORE: We're interested to see if being thrown off a building is beyond the G5's defensive capabilities. For this mouse we made sure the street below was clear of pedestrians, for their safety and because a soft, mushy landing for this lump of molded plastic would be unfair on the other contenders.

AFTER: The G5 appeared to be unscathed, but plugging it in reveals that something horrible has happened beneath the G5's untarnished exterior: it's not recognised at all by our PCs, much like a dog might not react to a wax model of its owner. That's two dead mice – this test is lethal.



RAZER DEATHADDER ★★★★★

BEFORE: The desk challenge left the DeathAdder's seriously wounded, so a 60mph impact may turn it into fine dust. Regardless, the test must continue. If the DeathAdder can just remain identifiable by a PC, then it will have beaten the other two louts, who've properly expired.

AFTER: The shock of the landing has taken the DeathAdder's upper layer clean off, revealing a terminator-like structure below. Plugging the mouse in it's apparent that the Razer is dead on arrival. We now have three paperweights of varying sizes, meaning that the third and final test is one of honour.

SMASH TEST THREE TAPING MICE TO YOUR SHOES

Do you ever get so mad at *Left 4 Dead* that you tape mice to the bottoms of your shoes and go for a run? Of course you do. We replicated this classic punishment on the remains of our mice. Which will fold under the pressure?



SAITEK CYBORG ★★★★★

BEFORE: We allowed the Cyborg to share a foot with the DeathAdder. This way, they would bear half the weight the G5 would have to endure. Sellotaping the mice to the bottom of Steve's foot was easy, though there are no points to be scored in that regard.

AFTER: The Cyborg is easily the most comfortable mouse to wear on feet. The angled surfaces made walking a doddle, and the Sellotape prevented any serious damage to the chassis. Removing the Cyborg from Steve's foot, we saw some severe scuffing on the remains of the mouse's rear-end.



LOGITECH G5 LASER ★★★★★

BEFORE: All of our mice are deceased, so what's left to test now is their structural endurance, and taping them to our feet is the only option we have, as we don't have power tools. The Logitech G5 gets a whole foot to itself for our little mousey jog, as we think it's the only one that can take the pressure.

AFTER: The G5 gladly takes on the role of a running shoe without much complaint, except the mouse wheel buckled under the 11 stones that makes up Steve. The first signs of external stress have appeared on the champion mouse! It wheels, but it no longer manages to click left and right satisfactorily.



RAZER DEATHADDER ★★★★★

BEFORE: The poor DeathAdder enjoys a position on the heel of Steve's left foot, sharing the sole-space with the Cyborg. In the final acts of our mouse stress test, can the DeathAdder redeem itself by not shattering underfoot and sentencing Steve to two months paid sick-leave?

AFTER: As the previous tests had reduced the DeathAdder to a hard, internal core, it emerged with nothing but some extra scuff marks. The unbreakable mass supported the weight of Steve as he jogged triumphantly across London, and for that we salute you. But overall... well, it's a bit of a mess, really.



Ain't he cute? The guy wearing him isn't though.

"The Logitech G5 gets a whole foot to itself, as we think it's the only one that can take the pressure"

DISCLAIMER

Do not try these tests at home (or anywhere else). PC ZONE will not be held responsible for the outcome of such rank stupidity.

THE SMASH YOUR MOUSE UP WINNER!

DESTROYED!

Three came, but only one could survive and become the winner.

OBLITERATED!

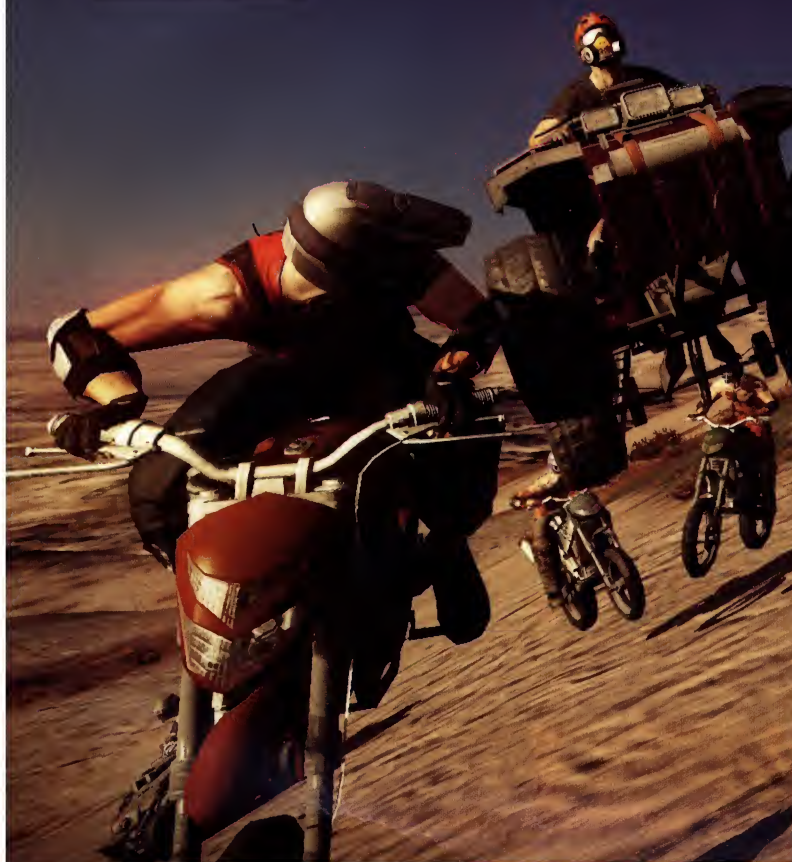
NOT SMASHED UP TOO MUCH!

LOGITECH G5 LASER

Apart from the fact that its insides have been blended into a fine mess of wires and circuit-boards (and we cut the cable off so we could use it as a running shoe), the Logitech G5 has come up smelling of victorious, unbreakable roses. A dodgy mousewheel is the only real battle scar the G5 has to show for its travails, but otherwise it's terrifically intact. Bravo, Logitech, bravo!

What will we smash next, and how? Keyboards? Under cars? Give us your suggestions on pczone.co.uk's forums - we'll take the best ones and act them out on these very pages! **PCZ**

Eat my dust and so on.



AUF WIEDERSEHEN PETROL...

FUEL

Banned from driving, *Steve Hogarty* likes to make revving noises on the bus

DEVELOPER Asobo Studios PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE snipurl.com/fuelgame PREVIOUSLY IN 204

SHALL WE RUN through the stats again, in case they've evaded you so far? *FUEL*'s game world covers a staggering 14,000km². But don't collapse in a breathless heap just yet – your GCSE geometry skills should tell you that works out at around 120x120km, which sounds only slightly less impressive. That's an area the size of Northern Ireland, or Montenegro

if that's easier a comparison for you to envisage.

Within this capacious geographical arena there are mountains, valleys, plateaus, canyons, deserts, forests and rivers – essentially a massive chunk of diverse middle-American environs ready to be raced across. Weather plays on the game's premise (that of post global-warming Earth in which fossil fuels have come back to bite us on the arse) so

tornados, snowstorms and rainstorms traipse about the landscape like meteorological newborn lambs, only stopping momentarily to bleat weather in your face before bouncing off again.

But what's the use in having a playing field the size of East Timor if the cars handle like luggage trolleys? We know the geography, the geometry and the meteorology of *FUEL*, but what about the chemistry? That's precisely the reason Codemasters offered to let us run amok in *FUEL*'s world, to get some real hands-on time with the game.

Though there are no loading times when travelling between them, the gigantic map is split into around 15 zones, each containing events. Career events progress the storyline, Challenge events are prescribed races with pre-

"Get your motor running."



determined rules, and Vista Points are collectable location markers perched atop *FUEL*'s most aesthetically pleasing views. New vehicle liveries, bonus cars and storm-chasing doppler trucks are available to find too.

Discovering a zone's various points of interest rewards you with stars, collect enough and they'll unlock a new zone – though unlocking in this case purely means making that zone's events available to play, as the entire map is

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ 14,000km² world
- ✓ Big old tornados
- ✓ Over 70 vehicles
- ✓ Open-ended racing
- ✗ Ropy car handling



THE STORY SO FAR... ASOBO STUDIOS



KALISTO
Makers of hits like
The Fifth Element and
Nightmare Creatures.

1992



ASBOS
Asobo have nothing
to do with Anti-Social
Behaviour Orders.

1998



THEY'RE GONE
The dot.com bubble
bursts and Kalisto
is liquidated.

2002

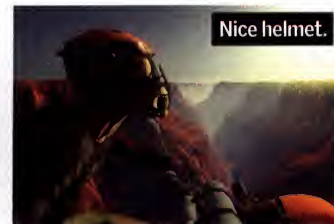


ASOBO
...allowing 12 ex-Kalisto
developers to found
Asobo Studios.

2002



Only 13,237km²
left to go.



Nice helmet.



It's not all on
two wheels.

A QUICK GUIDE TO FUEL

Rain, wind, gravel and dirt conspire to make *FUEL* brill

ON THE WHEEL

Handling is affected by different factors, the terrain you're racing on is a big one. Loose gravel will have you skidding like crazy, while tarmac will afford you tight and responsive cornering.

ON THE CHECKPOINT

Races have you speeding between checkpoints. Depending on the event, these will be spaced closely together to keep you on the straight and narrow, or far apart to allow you to find your own way across the map.

ON LIGHTNING

Weather effects are often dictated by the challenge event you're in, but when you're not racing you'll often come across random changes in the weather brought about by global warming. Or so scientists claim. Pfft, scientists.

ON THE OTHER CARS

You're not the only one capable of worming their way across the world in dangerous ways - some AI personalities will try to find their own path to the next checkpoint. Often with disastrous results.

ON THE ROAD

Weather can affect the surfaces you race on. This dirt track can be beaten into a muddy sloop by a sudden downpour, or baked hard floor in the midday sun. All of this, naturally, affects handling too.

open from the outset. *FUEL*'s world plays out in real-time too: a day lasts 12 minutes, though when it comes to traversing the huge distances between events you can make use of handy helipads dotted about the place. Chinooks then drop you off at starting lines. If you prefer, and why not in a world this intriguing, you can follow your compass to nearby events.

Playing through a few races gave a feel for how the game handles. Quad

bikes and scramblers are where *FUEL* excels, as its go-anywhere, off-road ethos is really allowed to shine. The road cars however, felt restrictive, their handling felt floatier than their two-wheeled counterparts and the physics were unconvincing, especially when they were compared to Codemasters' other racing games.

Many races bunch checkpoints close together to keep you on the exact route the developers had intended, while only

a few of the races we saw spread their checkpoints far apart enough to really allow you tear your own path through the world. One race in particular saw me booting my bike off the beaten path to carve a straight line to the next checkpoint, only to find myself in a deeply forested area. Turning hard in the mud and travelling sideways with my elbow almost touching the ground, I threaded the bike through a small gap between the ground and a fallen tree trunk, righting myself just in time to rejoin the race in pole position.

It was glorious, and summed up why I love *FUEL* in a single, muddy skid. More of the game's events will hopefully cater to this idea of "risk and reward",

instead of effectively locking you into a prescribed route. The cars need to be sorted out too, as at this point they're simply not as much fun to drive as the motorbikes. And while we're airing gripes, the tornado and storm effects, while beautiful, result in scripted carnage such as electricity pylons falling conveniently into the road in front of you. A world this impressive needs a bit more of a dynamic edge to it.

Still, a world the size of the Lambayeque Region of Peru (yes, the area known for its rich Chimú and Moche historical past) is nothing to be scoffed at. We'll have a full review next issue, unless something goes dreadfully wrong in Asobo's office. **PCZ**

"Quad bikes and scramblers are where *FUEL* excels, as its go-anywhere ethos is allowed to shine"



A VIRTUAL LIFE...

THE SIMS 3

Join *Ali Wood* as she books a one-way ticket to Simsville

DEVELOPER EA Redwood Shores PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE thesims3.com

WE'VE GOT SOME expansion pack ideas for you. "Ooooh!" says MJ Chun, associate producer for *The Sims 3*, clapping her hands with what I take to be glee, and we're not even talking *Pets*, *H&M*, *IKEA* or any such nonsense. The *PC ZONE* *Lazy Bum* and *Religious Zealot* expansion packs are from our No. 1 Ideas Factory and after pitching them to Chun, one thing becomes clear – EA Redwood Shores have got their sense of humour back. "Nice!" she says.

During our chat, Chun takes me through a few of the new features of *The Sims 3* and the first thing I notice is how creating a sim is much more sophisticated than before, with body type, facial features and hair styles all

helping to make the sim of your choice. Then you get to choose five traits from around 40 or so, like Workaholic, Neurotic, Evil, Kleptomaniac, Daredevil, Insane, Loves Partying, and Never Nude (the sim will even shower with their clothes on), each of which open up related behaviours. Lifetime wishes are stamped on the personality traits, and helping your virtual person complete these unlocks rewards along the way – like complimentary entertainment, a teleportation device, a mid-life crisis

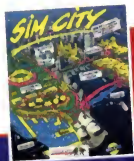
THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Improved Create A Sim tool
- ✓ Less Sim maintenance
- ✓ Custom Content Creator
- ✓ Neighbourhood exploration
- ✗ It's still The Sims



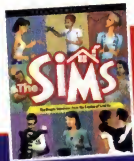
The new tools allow for greater control over appearances.

THE STORY SO FAR... THE SIMS SERIES



SIMCITY
SimCity turns a few sadistic PC players into slum landlords.

1999



THE SIMS
Said landlords begin starving people in sealed empty rooms.

2000



THE SIMS 2
More realistic sims leads to more realistic tortures.

2004



THE GITMO PACK?
Evil players demand a Guantánamo Bay add-on for *The Sims 3*.

2010



YOU'RE SIM-PLY THE BEST The Sims sales over the years



Nine years have past since Will Wright's lovingly made *The Sims* first appeared, allowing us to create and control people and furnish their homes with hot tubs and lava lamps. It quickly became the top-selling PC game of all time and we spent the next four years slugging it off, until the second installment arrived, this time tasking you with managing your sim over their entire lifetime.

The addictive gameplay soon had us sucked in again and then the expansions ruined it for us again.

To date more than 100 million of *The Sims*, *The Sims 2*, and expansion and stuff packs have been sold worldwide, while *The Sims'* online community has 4.2 million unique visitors per month.

ETA
5 JUNE
2009

(that's a reward?), and (wait for it) a steel bladder.

"That's how most people enter the game and fall in love with their sims!" explains Chun, whose enthusiasm for the game is infectious. "It means that you control, you put in as much effort to moulding these characters as you'd like and it's pretty eerie.

"We had one of the artists who created a couple of politicians, so we had George W Bush, Barack Obama, Sarah Palin and John McCain all living in the same house, fighting and running round the world, and they were all arguing, it was fantastic!"

Chun is currently playing with her sim Daryl who is in the criminal career track, loves the outdoors, is a

daredevil, loves being friendly, and is athletic (you have to keep fit to run from cops). His short-term wishes are: to get to know Zelda (no, not the Nintendo fella) better, to work out and be more buff, and "he also wants to 'woo-hoo' with Zelda," says Chun, which we smirk at. A bit.

"This is also slightly salacious," she hints, "because his best friend Phillip, is a ghost – he had an unfortunate accident with a computer and that electrocuted him. He died and he was brought back to life by Daryl, but Zelda is his girlfriend and now they've got a little love triangle going on! So is Zelda going to go for Phillip – a hopeless romantic, artistic and charismatic – a guy with the heart, or is she going to with the guy with the heartbeat?" We

"If you want to kill your sim, you can kill your sim"

often have similar dilemmas on PCZ, so feel pretty qualified to handle any such life changing decisions we're faced with.

One of the standout aspects about *The Sims 3* is that you can play it exactly how you like, if you want to spend hours, creating and customising your sim and stuff in your world with intricate designs or patterns, you can. Or if you'd rather just get stuck into gameplay, there are only minimal requirements to begin playing. Plus the open world keeps

the whole town loaded in at the same time, so your character can run around the whole neighbourhood.

"We paid attention to different types of playing," she says. "I love careers because, you can actually affect how you work in your job, so if I send Daryl to work, he can work hard, he can spend time getting to know his co-workers, suck up to the boss – these are all options I have.

"If I make him work too hard he'll be super-stressed and in a grouchy mood, so all of his interactions with his friends, or the things that he'll want to do, will be impacted."

Back to those expansions; can we expect more for *The Sims 3*? Because the games have always reviewed well in PC ZONE (*The Sims*: 86% and *The Sims 2*: 82%), it's just the expansions we've had problems with, and we don't want things to go down that route again.

"It's kind of interesting as we are so 'here' right now and expansion packs are usually what, as sims players, we would like to do with the game," says Chun. "So, I would love to have *Pets in Sims 3* or *Sims In Space* – that's what expansion packs are. For us, what it makes sense to add to the game.

"Often we get gameplay features that are meaningful to players that we didn't think about until expansion pack four where we thought 'that would be really cool' and that's where we'd have to go."

While there's no guaranteeing we won't be tearing our hair out when *The Sims 3: Beverly Hills Apartment Pooch Party Fashion Paradise Stories Deluxe* is announced, fans will adore *The Sims 3* and improvements including not having to find the nearest bog all the time, might just tempt lapsed gamers back. And, as Chun further coaxes: "You can totally kill your sims, starvation and drowning is still a part of the sims experience – if you want to kill your sim, you can kill your sim." That will do it for us, that and the Grim Reaper sim. **PCZ**

HERE BE KLINGONS...

STAR TREK ONLINE

"Captain's log," titters a puerile *Steve Hogarty*

DEVELOPER Cryptic PUBLISHER Atari WEBSITE startrekonline.com

MUCH LIKE WHEN 1980 passed by without personal heli-cars, and 2001 passed without insane computers refusing to open pod bay doors, it's likely our descendants will reach the year 2400 and be gravely disappointed with the lack of Klingons and warp drives. "All I wanted was a replicator," they'll moan, "but we've just got faster microwaves and slimmer iPhones."

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Huge number of planets
- ✓ Slow, tactical space combat
- ✓ Lots of environments
- ✓ Lots of customisation
- ✗ Will away missions be good?

This is probably the reason Cryptic have set their *Star Trek* MMO 30 years after the 10th movie – *Nemesis* – to give technology a little extra time to catch up. The Khitomer Accord – a peace treaty between the Klingons and the Federation – has broken down, and the two sides are at war once again. An ideal setting for a PvP-lead massively multiplayer *Star Trek* game.

"Setting it in the future lets us do some interesting things with the story," claims Craig Zinkovic, executive producer on *Star Trek Online*, "to really live up the universe. CBS are excited about us moving the franchise's storyline forward, and they've been really involved with what we're doing. We wanted to make something really familiar to fans of the show – but we

weren't trying to recreate the show, the episodes, or a moment in time."

FINAL FRONTIER

You play a Captain in either the Federation or the Klingon Defence Force, commanding a ship in an expansive, procedurally generated chunk of space. Exploration, questing and combat are the three pillars here. You can warp drive your way into uncharted systems, uncovering Borg wrecks, distress signals and mysterious planets. You can take missions from your superiors to defend or attack planets, fleets and space stations, beaming down and setting phasers to kill. And you can indulge in the sort of paced, methodical, tactical space combat the franchise is known for.

As "slow" is a negative word, this is why Cryptic refuse to call their MMO's combat anything but "paced". That said, space scraps in *Star Trek Online* are slow – ships have wide turning circles and crawl around one another to expose weak spots in enemy shields. You'll pick away at your enemy's defences with phaser fire from the bow and aft of your ship, before unloading a salvo of photon torpedos at the exposed hull. All the while, your own shields are being eroded as you attempt to redistribute power to affected areas.

The slowness of space combat is a definite positive. In fact it's no small relief when compared to the frantic key hammering of combat-orientated MMOs like *Champions Online*. While battles are paced and heavily strategic,

ETA
**AUTUMN
2009**



The Borg's ship of choice is a giant metal Oxo cube.



Going by the number of roving NPCs, this will be a lively MMO.



Spacestations provide hubs for instanced away missions.



Ah, a generic temple. A staple of *Star Trek*.

there's an underlying urgency to each battle fought, and a good mind for tactics brings genuine advantages.

Your phasers, for example, have firing arcs slightly in excess of 180°, meaning that if you expose your flank to the enemy you can double your firepower. Of course, this'll ensure your port or starboard shields will take a hammering, so a smart Captain will divert power to the required shielding – but how much power should you divert to the shield



"Cryptic have set their *Star Trek* MMO 30 years after the 10th movie – *Nemesis*"

Exploring the interior of your own ships is planned in a patch.



Peacefully exploring space is an option.

systems in total? Perhaps you'd rather pump more energy into your weapons systems, propulsion, or life support? Or maybe you'd prefer to just plough into the enemy with your ship and see who explodes first?

PLAYING CHICKEN

That's an option – "ramming speed" is one of your unlockable abilities. You earn these through recruiting Bridge Officers, your Geordi La Forges, Spocks and Deanna Trois. They can be found in a number of places (in Starfleet for example) or just randomly placed in the game world. You might help out a planet while exploring, who'll then offer you their best engineer. During space combat, your bridge officers' skills will unlock abilities like ramming speed, spreads of torpedoes, phaser overloads and other tricks.

Bridge officers are essential to playing the game, they've got names, can be leveled up and outfitted with new equipment, and they'll unlock new skills as they earn experience. On away missions – the on-foot segments of *Star Trek Online* – they'll act as AI allies, effectively MMO pets, falling into roles such as medics, soldiers and engineers.

Away teams consist of a squad of five officers. When playing alone, four bridge officers will make up this number, and when playing with other captains you'll all choose which of your officers will fill in the gaps. If you're particularly nifty with a medical tricorder, you'll rope in your security officers with their hefty plasma rifles to get your back. Similarly, if you're infiltrating a hostile station, you'll want some engineers around you to break through security systems you'll encounter.

These away missions remain under wraps though – only the space combat is being presented.

"You can give bridge officers limited sets of commands," explains Craig Zinkievich, executive producer on *Star Trek Online*. "But it's not like playing *Rainbow Six*, or

"Bridge officers' skills will unlock abilities like ramming speed and other tricks"



Klingons approach some council flats, almost certainly up to no good.

GIVE IT HERE

How *STO* passed from Perpetual to Cryptic...

Security officers can wield upgradeable phaser rifles.

Originally developed by Perpetual Entertainment, *Star Trek Online* passed to Cryptic in January of 2008 – but how much of Perpetual's stuff has been retained? "We purchased all of their assets," explained Craig Zinkievich, executive producer at Cryptic. "We haven't used any of their in-game assets though – our technology is super-mature, it's just awesome, so we weren't going to go there. I mean, you're not going to look at anybody else's design! You're going to make your own game! Which is what we're doing." Poor Perpetual.



PERPETUAL
Perpetual begin work
on *Star Trek Online*. A
million geeks rejoice.

2006



CRYPTIC
Perpetual muck it up,
and Cryptic take over.
A million geeks cheer.

2008



NIMOY
Leonard Nimoy shows
the game trailer. A
million geeks faint.

2008



FUTURE
Star Trek happens for
real! A million geeks
cry out "Told you so!"

2409

A procedurally generated
universe, guarantees
strange sights.



Ah, the 1001P-XN, a
classic Federation vessel.



See the hole in the asteroid?
You can fly through that.

Klingons like to put on their ships (spikes
and green paint probably).

"You can customise ships both
cosmetically and in terms of their
function," explains Zinkievich. "The
cosmetic changes keep the ship within
a certain look and feel, depending on the
ship class. You'll still be able to tell by
looking what class of ship it is." Colours,
running lights and materials can all be
changed too, and you can enter your
own ship designation. Finally, the USS
Burger King can be an all-too terrifying
reality. "We're still thinking about how
we'll number the ships – maybe we'll let
the player choose the designation
number, and end it with a letter that
increments every time they die."

"On the functionality side," continues
Zinkievich, "obviously you've got the
equipment you outfit your ship with, the
abilities of your bridge officers and how
you outfit your remaining crew." These
red shirts are a nameless swarm of



An icy planet, brr.

commanding a squad, it's more of a way
of directing them during encounters."

Planetary and station-bound
missions will be fast-paced, third-
person affairs with "positional aspects"
to consider when playing and Cryptic
are reluctant to say much more. Rather
than being revolutionary in itself, it
seems safe to suspect Cryptic are selling
this on the enticing mixture of these
on-foot sections and the space combat
sections. You're always moving from
space exploration to alien planetary

surfaces, and then to station interiors
before engaging in climactic space
battles. "It's important that it feels like
the show," assures Zinkievich.

Customisation plays a strong role in
Star Trek Online. Not only can you shape
the character you play, you can design
completely new races (to hell with the
canon) by slapping a load of ridges and
antennae on some poor lass' face. Your
ship – and you can own any number of
them – can be customised with nacelles
and saucers, or whatever kinds of things

disposable units under your command,
and can be beamed on to allied ships to
help repair their systems, or beamed on
to enemy ships to perform hostile
boarding actions.

Star Trek Online is still in its early
days though, and entire chunks of the
game remain neatly under wraps. We've
only still screenshots of away missions
to gawp at. The PvP is vague and
mysterious. And we haven't even seen
a Klingon yet. But already we're excited
about the sci-fi MMO. *Star Trek Online* is
a bold step away from the stagnant
fantasy in which the MMO genre is
steeped in, a name that carries with it
a base expectation of quality, from an
experienced developer who knows how
to deliver. The future looks bright. **PCZ**

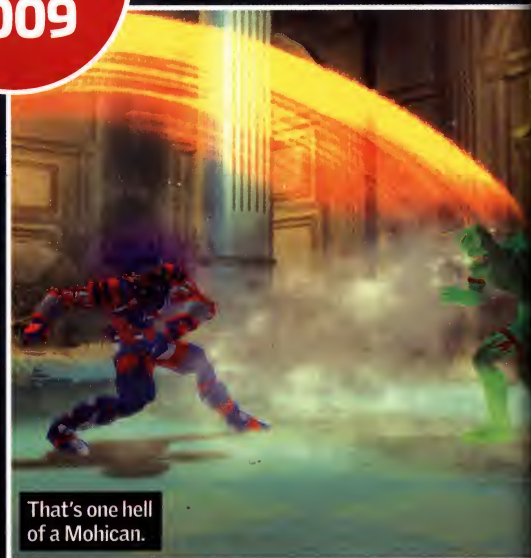
**"Star Trek Online is a bold step away from the fantasy
in which the MMO genre is steeped in"**

ETA
**JUNE
2009****WE ARE THE...**

CHAMPIONS ONLINE

"Might is right!" shouts *Steve Hogarty* while touching rings with four other men

DEVELOPER Cryptic PUBLISHER Atari WEBSITE champions-online.com



CAPTAIN NIPPY MCFREEZE turned from the biting wind to investigate the port-bow again. "Ice," he muttered as he lowered his eyeglass, referring to the limitless expanse of crunchy white stretching to the horizon. "Ice, ice, ice," he repeated, shaking his head, "Ice."

They'd been searching for lost gold off the coast of Antarctica for months now, and his band of skellington pirate minions were restless. Becoming increasingly aware that his origin story was dragging on a bit, he immediately tumbled into the crashing, icy surf. Frozen in that underwater hell and tormented for centuries by the Antarctic currents, McFreeze swore revenge on Solar, my firey superhero. Why? Well, it's very complicated and probably not worth anybody's time.

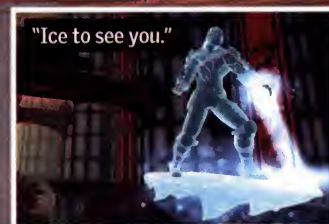
And so my nemesis Captain McFreeze was created. *Champions Online* takes Cryptic's fetish for customisation to incredible levels, offering you the chance to craft your nemesis with as much love and care as you do your own superhero. Choose their minions from a list of presets – from robotic cowboys to pirates and ninjas, and they'll pop up randomly during regular missions in the open world to put you off your stride.

Sometimes they'll cower, pleading with you not to cook them to a crisp with your fire-breath.

During my hands-on, a whimpering pirate promised to let slip Captain McFreeze's latest nefarious plan – a prison break! That dastardly fiend! Finding out such information unlocks the next mission in your nemesis' arc of quests – a series of adventures which culminates in their imprisonment in *Champions'* version of Arkham Asylum: the desert-bound Stronghold.

COOL IT

Champions Online will be instantly familiar to fans of Cryptic's first MMO, *City of Heroes*, a much more avatar-focused game than the *World of Warcrafts* and *Warhammer Onlines* of the world. Zones such as Monster Island, Millennium City and the Canadian Tundra allow you to fly about, shooting lasers (which can be customised, coloured and beamed from different places on your body) and lifting heavy objects in front of crowds of impressed onlookers. Your particular skillset is chosen during character creation and is dependent on your chosen origin, while new powers based on your skillset are awarded as you gain experience and level up.



Cryptic are calling *Champions Online* an "action MMO", one less concerned with strategy, aggro and tactical smarts than with throwing desks, blocking attacks and hammering keys. You'll have a relatively weak base ability (in Solar's case, chucking fireballs) which increases your energy bar as it does damage. Once you've stored up some energy you can use more powerful abilities. You can charge these powers by holding down the required key – the longer you charge the more powerful the attack. Solar's abilities included a chargey uppy fireball, a fire breath power which damages enemies in a cone, and Pyre, an area of effect ability which burns all enemies within a certain radius.

There are lingering hardcore MMO traits in play here too. Enemies have an implicit aggro radius and projectile attacks will, generally speaking, always meet their target, making positioning and cover redundant. Where it departs from these tenets most noticeably is in the ability to block certain attacks, which are signposted by flashing

onomatopoeias above enemy heads. It lends a real physicality to the game's combat, much like *Age of Conan's* extensive fighting system did.

Co-operative play is key to *Champions'* instances. In the hands-on, myself and three other heroes were tasked with building a robot using a giant grabbing arm. With each of us manning a direction button, it was a matter of fiddling co-operation and copious luck to get the job done. Difficult as it was when we were



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Very customisable characters
- ✓ Larger open areas than *COH*
- ✓ Design your own nemesis
- ✗ Co-operative bits may not work
- ✗ Tactically shallow combat



CRYPTEIA

Jack Emmert did want to call Cryptic Crypteia.

2000



NCSOFT

Cryptic sign a deal with NCSOFT to get their games released.

2002



SOLD!

Cryptic sell *City of Heroes* to NCSOFT, and wave their baby away.

2007



REBORN?

Champions Online is announced: a second stab at heroic MMOs.

2008



"Come back here, you blue-skinned ponce!"

shouting at each other across the room, taking this online might prove disastrously frustrating when live – one clueless mouth-breather could ruin the instance for everybody.

As with Cryptic's *City of...* games, the real triumph here will be the sheer customisability. No other MMO will have you so immediately involved in and tied to your character, so willing to

indulge in a 500-word biography detailing their tragic origin, and spend an hour thinking of the perfect name. I want to draw pictures of Captain McFreeze punching his way out of an iceberg, screaming "Solaaaaaaaar!?". I want to write a sonnet about my hero's victory over the ice pirate hordes. I want to give Solar a Twitter account and write "I WILL FIREPUNCH YOU IN THE BALLS, CAPTAIN MCFREEZE," so everybody knows how awesome he is. Can you say the same of your *World of Warcraft* dwarf? **PCZ**

"No other MMO will have you so immediately involved in and tied to your character"

That's for wearing a stupid hat!

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LET THE BLOODSHED BEGIN...

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

Wearing his camocream, *Steve Hogarty* crawls around in dirt

DEVELOPER Codemasters PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE codemasters.co.uk/flashpoint PREVIOUSLY IN 203

ETA
**JUNE
2009**

YOU MIGHT NOT realise it – perhaps because you're a reasonable human being – but there's a contingent of PC gamers who're ready to hate *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising* the moment they get their grubby, disapproving paws on it. Their fears are rooted in the darkest recesses of the PC gamer's ego, the part of their soul that spurns anything making

even the vaguest concession to console gamers. Let's admit it, this is down to our intrinsic superiority complex; our defense mechanism to protect us from the fact that our gaming machine of choice is 10 times as expensive as any console around. Hands up who's never looked at a niggling fault in a game and blamed it on a PlayStation?

"There's a myth, a fallacy," explains Sion Lenton, executive producer on *OpFlash 2*, "about a difference in IQ between console games and PC gamers. It's important to state that we're not dumbing *OpFlash* down for consoles –

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ 220km² playing area
- ✓ Clever AI
- ✓ Full mission editor
- ✗ Outrageously complex
- ✗ Weak driving model

if anything we're trying to raise the bar, in terms of what's acceptable, and what's too difficult to do, on consoles."

As if to give credence to the idea that I'm playing a PC game, I'm shot by a gunman hiding in trees 400 metres away. The round bores through my arm, causing a critical wound, and putting me out of commission until one of my three co-op buddies can figure out which key whips out the field dressing. They can't and I bleed out. I'm dead, and I've no idea who killed me. Brilliant.

"That's *Operation Flashpoint!*" exclaims Lenton, before cringing at his own cheesiness.

KEEP IT REAL

The original *Operation Flashpoint*, from Bohemia Interactive (who are now working on *Armed Assault II*) was a po-faced, ultra-serious simulation; an unfalteringly realistic depiction of modern warfare which had detail fans frothing at the mouth – this is what players are afraid of losing. However, *OpFlash 2* is at the very least acutely aware of its heritage.

"We had to change the US uniforms three times," despairs Lenton, explaining how they'd update textures every time the military decided to give their troops a new look.

The authenticity and realism continues, driven by over 400GB of research data. Weapon load-outs are visible on a soldier's person. Arming, say, a Javelin missile launcher takes a few minutes as you stoop to assemble the component parts, and the HUD it

uses is exactly what you'd see were you to fire a real one. And you only get one shot too: the things cost £250k each, so you really don't want to miss your target. Bullets kill, and suppressing fire is an essential tactic in skirmishes. This certainly isn't *Call of Duty* – start spraying rounds in the direction of the enemy and they'll take cover – the AI soldiers are as concerned with keeping their own life, as with ending yours.

So be at ease. *OpFlash 2* isn't running an important series into the ground, in pursuit of some *Far Cry 2*-style action and adventure. If anything, it'll be the console gamers feeling the winds of change as their typically realism-light platform is brought kicking and screaming into a gritty world of genuine one-shot kills and strategic open-world combat.

OpFlash 2's setting is the based-on-a-real-place island of Skira: a 220km² military playground, peppered with conflict between the US and China. Across the two



"Tsk, look at this pesky war. It's everywhere."



These guys can be fitted with rockets too.



APCs: the caravans of the tank world.



Order your squad to move quickly and they'll take more risks.

"OpFlash 2 isn't running an important series into the ground"



All of a soldier's gear is visible on his person.



The spec ops campaign unfolds at night. Mostly.

separate three-day campaigns, you'll command a four-man team on a series of missions. Most of these take place in small areas of the map, but when you get access to aircraft missions will have wider arenas.

The primary campaign sees you take on an infantry role, engaging the enemy at mid-to-long range using whatever means are handy. On occasion you'll have access to some heavy ordnance, such as howitzers and air strikes. The massive explosions these cause are rendered beautifully: there's no dramatic eruption of flame, rather you'll see a 100ft tall column of dirt stab the sky moments before the deep boom of the explosion reaches you. These are treats, and for the most part you'll be using your wits and your rifles.

Commands can be delivered to AI teammates through a radial menu, with position-sensitive orders (orders to move, for example) being directed by your crosshair. You effectively point at things you want your men to run to – much how a real squad leader would dole out directives – while also telling them how you want them to behave as they go. This allows for cautious

approaches, with your team only firing on your lead, or aggressive flanking manoeuvres over large distances.

For more control over these tactical movements, you'll also have access to your military map, on which you can perfectly hone your strategies, as well as get the lay of the land. Orders can be queued up to be carried out in sequence too, and then called off when this inevitably go tits up. Teammates will act and move intelligently without your guiding hand, though when it comes to breaking stalemates the ability to effectively manage your team is crucial.

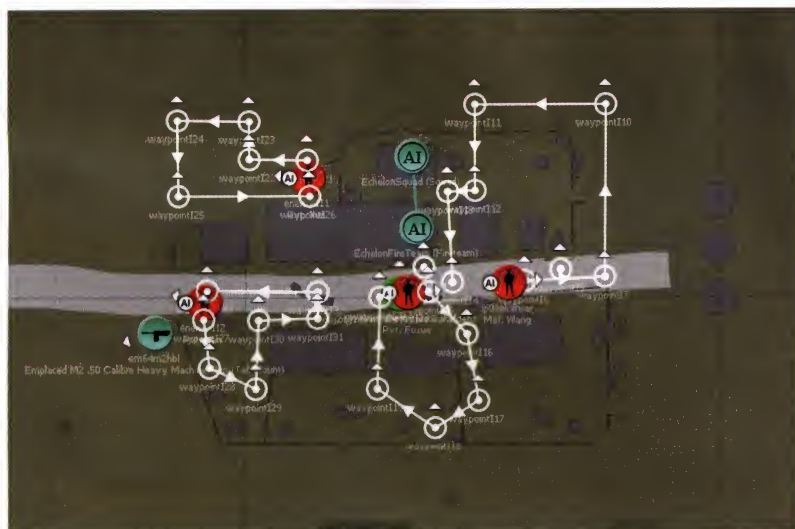
Saying that, if you traipse around like a mental bastard firing madly into the air, they'll – rightly – tell you to feck off before doing their own thing. To hell with the chain of command, and all that.

On top of the infantry campaign, *OpFlash 2* features a special forces campaign which focuses on stealth. This runs alongside the infantry campaign, with missions overlapping



The film grain is part of a "War through the lens" visual style.

GOD OF WAR *OpFlash's* mission editor arrives unscathed



A huge part of *OpFlash's* appeal was its mission editor. This was the same tool as Bohemia used to build the game's missions. And Codemasters are making a similar piece of kit available in *OpFlash 2*.

Players be given the same toolkit the game's developers used to build the massive battles that occur in missions. It's simple to use, with a drag-and-drop interface allowing you to create missions in seconds, and a one-click launcher flinging you into the game and your custom-built mission in moments.

The mission editor is also as powerful as you want it to be, with the option to write your own scripts in Lua – a popular, but simple, scripting language used by game developers.

THE STORY SO FAR...
**OPERATION
FLASHPOINT**



OPFLASH

The original war sim from Bohemia was brutally unforgiving.

2001

ARMED ASSAULT

Bohemia lose the *OpFlash* name, but keep the spirit.

2007



ARMA II

Later this year, the second *Arma* title will touch down.

2009



DRAGON RISING

Later this year, Codex's official *OpFlash* sequel will touch down.

2009

"OpFlash 2 is not the blight on a PC classic some pessimists are expecting"

Worrying, the helicopter physics researchers have only flown remote control helicopters.

AI can no longer see through smoke.

at some key points. You might, for example, infiltrate an enemy-controlled village at 4am as the special forces team to destroy some key structures and sabotage Chinese artillery support. Then, during the Infantry campaign, you'll arrive at the weakened village at 10am as part of a larger operation to take control of the region.

At any point you can break away from your mission. Skira is fully loaded into memory from start-up, so there's not a loading screen between you and the opposite end of the island. You'd fail your mission – as most missions come with a completion time attached – but you'd come across some intelligently

spawned enemies and allies. The wider conflict is realistically played out across Skira, and the engine keeps track of incursions, retaliations, troop and armour movements and other dynamic, ever-changing war facts. You might bump into a retreating armoured unit, or a small, pinned-down Chinese force – but things will be where they're supposed to be, and you won't encounter a platoon of chirpy US marines wandering in Chinese territory.

HERE BE DRAGONS

Moving away from your objective isn't just a means of abandoning your mission though. In the scenario I played, my attempts to escort an armoured unit using my Humvee were scuppered by a pair of APCs perched between me and my target, situated atop a mountain 3km away. Rather than staying out of the APC's firing range, I opted to take the long way round. By driving in a huge semicircle I rounded the enemy units and drove my Humvee to the edge of destruction by ploughing up the steep incline towards my target. It didn't work, as I was picked off by a patrol, but it shows to what degree the geography allows for an open-ended mission structure.

I have a few concerns, firstly with the game's driving model. The Humvee was the only vehicle we were given to test, and it felt both rigid and floaty – like driving an armoured cloud. This is surprising as *OpFlash 2* is built on the same technology powering racers *DiRT* and *GRID*. And while Codemasters promised increases in the draw distance of details like grass and trees (the landscape stretches out for 36km), what we've been shown so far features some ropery and bland horizons.

You can count on those concerns being at the very least recognised by Codemasters in the run up to release. Either way, they're niggling troubles. Not only is *OpFlash 2* not the blight on a PC classic some pessimists are expecting, it's a worthy successor to the original. This is a modern war sim with authenticity at its core, and a level of accessibility that concedes nothing to the blockbuster scripted behemoths of *Call of Duty* and *Gears of War*. **PCZ**

Mirror, signal, wave
gun around.

ETA
**WINTER
2009**

THE ITALIAN JOB...

MAFIA II

Grabbing his trilby and Tommy gun, *Steve Hogarty* heads downtown

DEVELOPER 2K Czech PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE mafia2game.com

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Detailed, vibrant world
- ✓ Incredibly well directed
- ✓ Excellent voice acting
- ✓ Drenched in atmosphere
- ✗ Too many cutscenes

The laundry room
shoot out is steamy.



THE STORY SO FAR...
2K CZECH

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS
2K Czech's WWII shooter appears.

1999



MAFIA
We all love Mafia so much we run around in circles.

2002



CZECH YOURSELF
Illusion Softworks' name changes to 2K Czech after a buy-out.

2008



MAFIA II
Soon we'll witness a game that can only be described as Mafia II.

2009

Car handling's been tweaked to make driving more fun.



IN THE HOOD

Places and faces

Isn't it great that we've reached the point on the PC gaming timeline where we no longer have to mention that, while Empire Bay City is broken into 20 distinct neighbourhoods, there's no loading times between any of them? Just imagine when we reach the point where we don't even have to mention us not mentioning it. That'll be a moment to silently cherish!

The city's districts range from picket-fenced suburbia to industrial estates. The type civilians you meet vary too, from violent Irish drunks (2K Czech's generalisation) and Sicilian housewives, to well-dressed upper classes and business sorts.



THOUGH NOT AS eyebrow-raising as having a jet-packing T-rex crash through the wall, *Mafia II* plays about with a few curious anachronisms. As our hero Vito Scaletta attaches a bomb to the underside of a table he hums the *Mission: Impossible* theme tune, a TV show which wouldn't have existed until a decade later. I can't tell if this is a deliberate inclusion or an oversight. "We've a few Easter eggs like that," laughs Jarek Kolár, senior gameplay producer on *Mafia II*, "references to other movies and games..."

Regardless, it fits. The tone of the game is that of almost every gangster movie you could mention: gallows humour from impassioned larger-than-life characters, cut with a weighty '40s and '50s atmosphere achieved through the careful design choices of 2K Czech. The boxy, putt-putt toy cars of the first

game have been replaced with sleek, fashionable new motors. Fashion itself has evolved, as evidenced by a pile of yellowing editions of mid-century Sears catalogues scattered about the studio.

The game engine allows for 70 unique, high-poly characters to be rendered on screen at the same time, transforming the streets of Empire Bay City into a catwalk through time. When you brawl with an unruly gent in the street, their suit jackets flap and sway. As you slam a thug into the hood of your automobile, your tie swings about. The thunk of the bonnet as it buckles under pressure (2K Czech gleefully announce that their engine can play some big number of sounds at the same time, and that's important) and the scuffling of feet on gravel (2K Czech are also proud that no feet in the game will ever slide along the ground, a testament to their detailed



The view from the roof of the Empire Arm Hotel.

"The tone of the game is that of almost every gangster movie"

VIEW FROM THIS SIDE

Peter Graves he most certainly ain't.



Drive recklessly and you'll attract attention.



animation system) conspire to convince you that you're there, and absolutely submerged in this gorgeous world and this evocative era.

In the year since we last saw *Mafia II* it's approaching visual maturity. Just let your eyes wander about these pages and you'll notice how polished the game looks: car traffic is denser, and the elaborate pathing systems that prevent embarrassing AI pile-ups are in place.

MUSICAL SMARTS

The soundtrack (*Mafia II* boasts the most licensed tunes of any 2K game to date) is threaded into a cinematic audio system that gauges the situation and plays appropriate music through your car's radio. It looks at where you are, what time it is, and what you've just done or are about to do. Rolling home in the black of night after a bloody gunfight? You'll want something sombre and contemplative. Cruising in the summer sun with your buddies? *Get Rhythm* by Johnny Cash will fit nicely. The dynamic playlist will be punctuated by era-specific advertising, as well as news stories relating your misdeeds and the big events of the time.

2K Czech also took the time to show us the seasons in which *Mafia II* takes place. Coming home from the war in 1947, Vito will be faced with an Empire

Bay City in the grip of winter, where post-war depression looms over the city. As the plot moves forward we're shown the city baking in the summer sun, while the closing scenes in the late '50s are in a spectacular, golden autumn.

The weather isn't dynamic. Nor does the time of day change as you play. Drawing parallels with games like *Grand Theft Auto IV* here is all too easy, but it's an entirely misleading comparison. Empire Bay City only partly falls under the tired adage of a "living, breathing city" – it's more an elaborate backdrop to the game's plot, than a feature-crammed open-world playground.

The first *Mafia* was much the same: you could walk around Lost Heaven for

Vito and Joe infiltrate the conference room. Clever buggers.



The most violent episode of *Blind Date* ever.



"Drawing parallels with games like *GTA4* is too easy"

VITO SCALETTA

DESCRIPTION

Alias: Unknown

Place of Birth: Sicily

Height: 5' 11"

Weight: 200lbs

Scars and Marks: Long, distinct scar along left jawline, which wasn't there in our last preview.

Remarks: Son of Sicilian immigrant. Scaletta recently left the US Army and is known to be proficient with small arms. Approach with caution.



JOE BARBARO

DESCRIPTION

Alias: Joe 'The Barber' Barbaro

Place of Birth: Empire Bay City

Height: 5' 7"

Weight: 220lbs

Scars and Marks: Small scar on chin. Possibly from an epic gun battle, or perhaps from shaving.

Remarks: Barbaro's reputation as a petty criminal is known throughout Little Italy. Is known to have contacted Scaletta upon his return from service.



as long as you pleased, but you quickly discovered that it's not a place infested with Kill Frenzy bonuses, hidden comedy sub-quests, secret bazookas and remote-controlled helicopters. Empire Bay City is a setting, the plate on which the meaty plotline rests. That works well here – *Mafia II*'s got a stronger narrative than any open-world game you could care to mention, and Empire Bay City's the perfect vehicle for it.

We're shown a mission in full – Room Service – from roughly halfway through the game. It's the summer of 1951, and having just become made men, buddies Vito and Joe are tasked with carrying out a hit on a rival mob boss by planting dynamite in a conference room on the upper floors of the Empire Arms Hotel.

The mission opens with Vito standing with his back to a cathedral, above him a train thunders past, around him pedestrians chatter, a man lights a cigarette and mumbles to himself, cries of "Extra! Extra!" come from a paperboy on the corner, and

birds sing chirpy nonsense from the church grounds. The cathedral bells ring out the hour. It's a setpiece, an in-game establishing shot, but that makes the detail shown here no less astounding. After meeting with Joe and Marty, your getaway driver, the three men exchange banter en route to the hotel.

Kolár, meanwhile, explains how branching side-missions work. "As we're pushing the player towards his goal," says he, "in many missions we'll place activities along the way, some situations that arise from the city life and draw the player's attention. He can explore these side activities if he pleases."

"There are ways to earn money in the city," claims Denby Grace, product manager at 2K, "and there are ways to

VIEW FROM THIS SIDE



A modified Colt 1911 with a 23 round clip – phew!



What is it with *Mafia* and burning hotels?



Empire Bay City is based on San Francisco and New York City.

spend your money too. But the actual side missions are fully integrated into the fiction, we never want to stop the player feeling like Vito Scaletta."

MAFIA MORALITY

"I've got a good example," he adds: "Say you're on this mission here, on your way to the hotel. As you're about to cross the street there might be a car crash, and an old lady gets knocked down. So she screams 'Argh, help me' - and now you can either say 'Well, I'm an asshole' and just walk away, or you can go and help her by chasing down the guy who's just hit her. The game throws a moral question at you."

Vito and chums negotiate their way through Empire Bay City, arriving at the hotel's underground car park. Joe meets his man on the inside, who leaves you with the keys to the laundry room and access to some cleaner's overalls. With your disguise sorted, you both make your way to the lofty mobster's suite on the 18th floor.

"What you're seeing here," notes Grace, "is an edited cut of the full mission. When you get to play it, you'll

see that Joe's informant doesn't show up and you're forced to find another route into the laundry room. The actual mission will take upwards of 45 minutes to complete."

Exiting the elevator, you're quickly ushered into the conference room to clean up a mess before the big mob meet (apparently "somebody err, spilled somethin' in there."). The floor is packed with folks admiring the sky-high view and drinking at an expensive wine bar. Snippets of conversation can be heard as you're led through the relaxed lounge area to the conference room. "One of the



Cohorts can shoot while you drive, or you can get stuck in yourself.



"Mafia II is shaping up to be a worthy successor to the original"

guys in here earlier tripped and hit his head," explains your wiseguy guide, "about five or six times. Poor guy."

Once in the conference room, Vito and Joe get to work planting bombs and humming incongruities, ignoring the conspicuous dark red stain on the carpet. The bomb needs to be wired up to a trigger, so the window is prepared to have the wire threaded through it.

"The trap is set," explains Grace, "so what the guys are going to do now is go upstairs to the roof, then use a window washing platform they'll come

down outside the window, rig the bomb and detonate it – there were no remote devices back in the '50s. Well that's the plan anyway."

ALL GONE WRONG

Joe hands Vito a 1911 Colt, "Just in case something goes wrong". And of course it does, the rooftop turns out to be a shooting gallery of men in long coats and homburgs. The eventual detonation of the bomb leaves the rival mob boss utterly unharmed (he was in the toilet at the time), and the resulting chase through the hotel sees Vito and Joe taking cover behind bars, shooting through satisfyingly smashable plate





The view from the conference room amazes made men.



Fights can be avoided, but that's not as much fun.

glass windows, and working their way back down to street level.

"We wanted to make a basic combat system," claims Kolár, "with just a few buttons. But with our animation technology the game can recognise what the situation is by using the timing and the distances in the environment," and then play out the appropriate animation. For the player it'll be really varied and rewarding."

Vito smashes a man's head into a wall to prove the point, before the missions ends in a car chase. "In the

first *Mafia* the cars were pretty much a simulation," admits Grace, "we've taken a few more liberties this time, and made the cars that bit more exciting. There's still a realism factor to it, as you screech round a corner a hubcap might fly off, or the bumper will come away slightly. We want it to feel dramatic, we want it to feel exciting.

"You can buy cars, store cars and customise cars too," he adds, "we really want the player to get attached to their vehicle." Auto shops in Empire Bay City allow you to upgrade your cars with hot

rod engines, side pipes and flaming paint jobs straight out of *The California Kid*. It's an expensive hobby, so you'll be able to carry out some basic repairs on your car should it be riddled with bullet holes mid-mission, or at least enough of a repair job to get it back to your garage in one piece.

The car chase fades before our eyes are irreparably scarred by free-flying spoilers, and the mission demonstration comes to a close. *Mafia II* is shaping up to be something very great, and at the very least a worthy successor to the original game. The demonstration does shed light on a few concerns, namely the regularity with which the game tugs the controls rudely out of your hands to roll out a cutscene, however well directed,

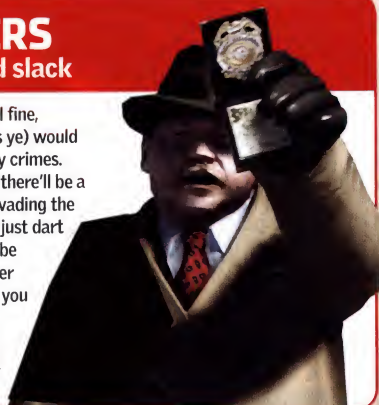
shot and voiced they may be. And before we can get our hands on the controls we can only guess how changes to the car handling will affect things.

The style and detail, and the changing of the artistry and design of Empire Bay City across two decades is nonetheless spectacular – even the invention of TV is incorporated into your rags to riches story, with Joe's apartment becoming increasingly well-furnished as the plot progresses. New cars are introduced, improved weapons become available, and new music can be heard on the radio – the city and the world transform before your eyes as the game continues and years tick by. A minefield of potential anachronisms that may be, but it's a minefield we'll all too readily explore. **PC7**

COPS 'N' ROBBERS

Mafia II's police are a tad slack

In the original game, the boys in blue (all fine, upstanding Irish immigrants – God bless ye) would have you in cuffs for even the most petty crimes. Accidentally wave your gun around and there'll be a warrant out for your arrest. This time, evading the police for minor infringements is easier, just dart around a corner and your misdeeds will be forgotten about. Speeding laws are looser too, and as you become more notorious, you can expect more leniency from the coppers. "Ah, M-mister Scaletta," they'll stutter as they turn a blind eye, "I didn't realise. Carry on."



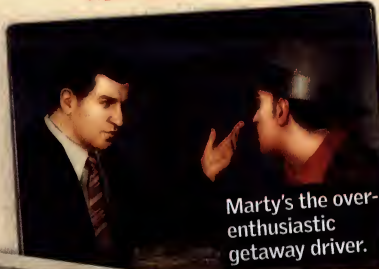
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FOR ALL DEBTS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

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Register Book

Treasurers of the United States

VIEW FROM THIS SIDE



Marty's the over-enthusiastic getaway driver.

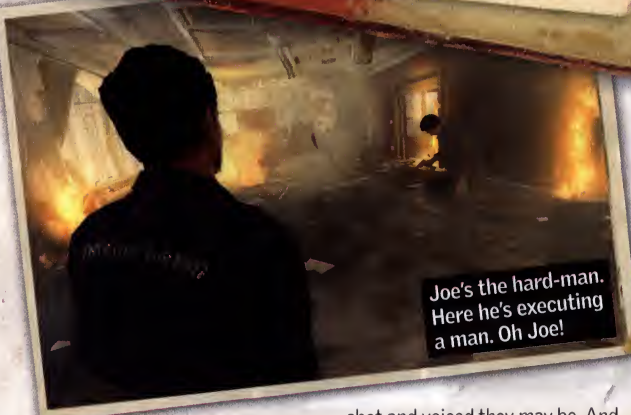
Here's the bloke you're after, Clementi. Like the orange.



VIEW FROM THIS SIDE



sigh We wish we had awesome hats.



Joe's the hard-man. Here he's executing a man. Oh Joe!

Play against thousands of opponents - 100% free to play – no download required

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PCZONE Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

DIE-TEK

WE LOVE GREAT things – which made it terribly difficult to take a Saitek Cyborg gaming mouse and slam it into a desk until it broke (p34). It's such a pretty mouse.

Worse still, I sit next to David, whose kleptomania causes objects to gravitate to him like a greedy continental drift. "Maybe we can keep the ones that don't break?", he'd say as he gingerly taps a Logitech G5 against a shelf. "If they don't break," I'd reply, "we break them harder. We break them until they're broken."

But in terms of reviews of games, *Dark Athena's* where you should be putting your attention. If you haven't played a *Riddick* game, this is your chance to get shiving.

And now a confession: remember *Braid*? That indie game that was a smash on consoles, and we said was in this issue, on the cover? A last-minute glitch meant we couldn't get a copy to review. Sorry if your hopes have been cruelly dashed.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty,
Deputy editor

MUST BUYS! ✓

PC ZONE Classics are hard to come by, and when you see one you should drop to the floor and refuse to move until someone buys you the game...



Fallout 3 Left 4 Dead GTA4

62 ESCAPE FROM DARK ATHENA

He's bald. He's hard. And he's returned to our PCs in his shiv-tastic sequel...

THE PC ZONE BADGES



CLASSIC (90%+)

Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to get the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



DUMP (0-19%)

PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.



ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

THE PC ZONE GAMING MACHINE

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



ALSO REVIEWED

- 64 **TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.**
Imagine *Top Gun*, only without the homoerotic subtext.
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Clive Barker's Undying, Red Alert, Runaway, and Sid Meier's Alpha Centuri Complete.
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PCZONE
SWEARS...

- ✓ To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers
- ✓ To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- ✓ To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- ✓ To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- ✓ To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA



DEVELOPER Starbreeze Studios
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE atari.com/riddick
ETA 24 April
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Our second-favourite hairless assassin returns to brutalise his enemies, intimidate his allies, and wallow in the blood of the vanquished.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.8GHz Intel Pentium or AMD Athlon X2 +3800, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista), and a ATI Radeon HD 2600 XT or NVIDIA GeForce 6800 Ultra.

HOW IT STACKS

ASSAULT ON
DARK ATHENA **87%**

ESCAPE FROM
BUTCHER BAY **86%**

CONDEMNED:
CRIMINAL ORIGINS **85%**

The gravel-voiced, psychopathic baldy makes a comeback, and *David Brown* is strangely excited

THE FIRST *RIDDICK* game, *Escape from Butcher Bay*, was one that everyone said they loved, but nobody seemed to have played much. Yet it was that rarest of breeds: a console port that wasn't total bullshit. When we learned of *Assault on Dark Athena*, our pants moistened in anticipation.

INTO THE DARK

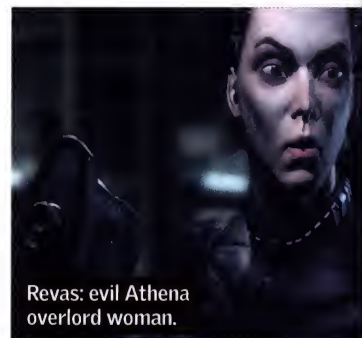
The game starts off after the end of *Butcher Bay* with Riddick (you) and Johns, your mercenary companion, journeying through space in stasis. True to form, your ship is captured by a vast merc vessel, the titular Dark Athena. Riddick's stasis is interrupted in time for him to hide from the invaders, while Johns is carted off. From there, you begin to infiltrate the ship, uncovering what the mercenaries are doing and why they captured your ship in the first place.

Veterans of the first game will instantly be back in their element. Despite *Athena* being a sequel (there's a new story and enough content to warrant the asking price, even without including the updated *Butcher Bay* – see 'Back to the Bay') the gameplay is almost identical to that in *Butcher Bay*.

Riddick is adept at hiding in the shadows, using his Eye Shine ability to see in the dark. Most of the early stages of the game are spent sneaking about, killing enemies with stealthy attacks and hiding their bodies. Later on things take an action-oriented turn, with far more shooting than stealth, which provides some variety to the gameplay, although it might offend the sensibilities of stealth-o-philes.

Another thing that has carried over from *Butcher Bay* is the visceral combat. Apart from maybe the first *Condemned* title, the *Riddick* series probably has the

most brutal fighting in any game we've ever seen. Not necessarily the goriest, but certainly the most brutal. Skilled players are treated to a plethora of ruthless killing strikes, accompanied by appropriately gruesome sound effects. Probably the coolest weapons in the game are the Ulaks: curved, serrated blades that wrap around Riddick's hands, acting like bladed knuckle-dusters.



Revas: evil Athena overlord woman.

A rare moment of solace in a violent world.



The Dark Athena itself.

If anyone else said this, it'd sound ridiculous.

Tell me about the captain. You don't want me to think you're useless. That never ends well.

You get to stomp about in a mech at one point.

They can also be used to stab people, something Riddick does with his customary aplomb. For example, he might drive the end directly into the face of an adversary or viciously slash his throat from behind. Each melee style has distinct killing moves, so you'll almost certainly be mixing things up in combat, just to see what happens.

BLOODY BLOOD

The fighting is brilliantly visceral and weighty and so is the reason you are doing the fighting in the first place. The plot is interesting and the characters are well conceived, from the sheer evil of Jaylor (who matches the grimy brutality of the game) to the dry calmness of Lance Henriksen's Max Dacher. Just like in *Butcher Bay*, the characters look and act realistically. So often companies forget about this, but Starbreeze and Tigon have made sure the more

cinematic sides of the game are as satisfying as the action.

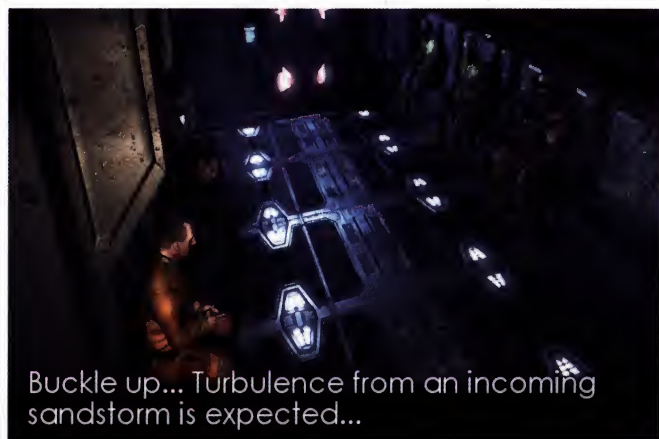
There are a couple of things that people might not like, though. For a start, the increased focus on action later on, which feels strange considering you've been effectively avoiding combat for such a long time. There's definitely something much more satisfying about clearing a room of enemies using only your wits and the shadows.

There's also the question of how much the gameplay has moved on from 2004's *Butcher Bay*; the answer being not that much. There's the argument that it doesn't boast enough new material to be a sequel and warrant it being given our Classic award.

Having said all that, these are just minor niggles that could (and most likely will) be ignored by the vast majority of players. Starbreeze have kept up their almost impeccable track record

BACK TO THE BAY

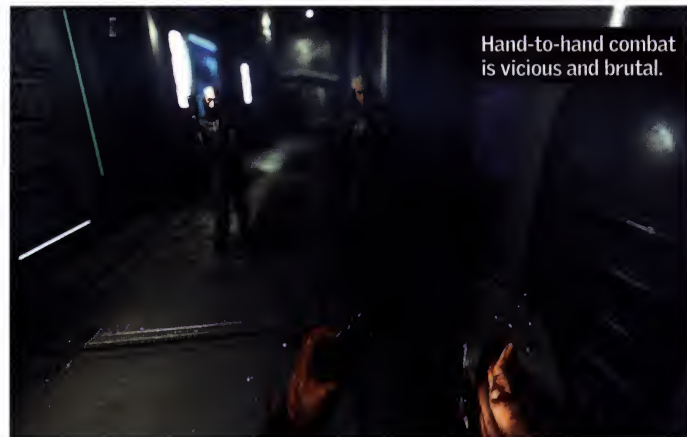
If you want to, you can escape all over again



Buckle up... Turbulence from an incoming sandstorm is expected...

Buying *Dark Athena* also gets you *Escape from Butcher Bay* - the gaming prequel to the movie *Pitch Black*. This is a game that surprised us all when it first appeared by being so damned good. This is great news for those who never took the plunge on it, but also for those who did. Starbreeze have set a great standard for other developers by revamping their older game with graphical tweaks and improvements that are in *Dark Athena*. If this isn't reason enough to revisit an old classic, we don't know what is.

Hand-to-hand combat is vicious and brutal.



with this game, producing an excellent game that would have breached the 90% barrier had it been a little bit more substantial and erred less on the combat side of things. And if you disagree, I'll slit your throat with an Ulak. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Sublime at times
SOUND Great voice-acting
MULTIPLAYER Includes Pitch Black and Riot modes

- ✓ Brutal combat
- ✓ Excellent acting
- ✓ Includes *Butcher Bay*
- ✓ Intriguing plot
- ✗ Too much shooting later on
- ✗ Not enough progress

87
Stylish and brilliant



TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.

Planes, planes, and plane-omobiles...
aerophile *Steve Hogarty* couldn't be happier

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Romania
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE hawxgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

A frighteningly simple but slick arcade sky-shooter with more bravado and over-excited whimpering than a naked, thrusting Tom Cruise.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista) and a 128MB video card.

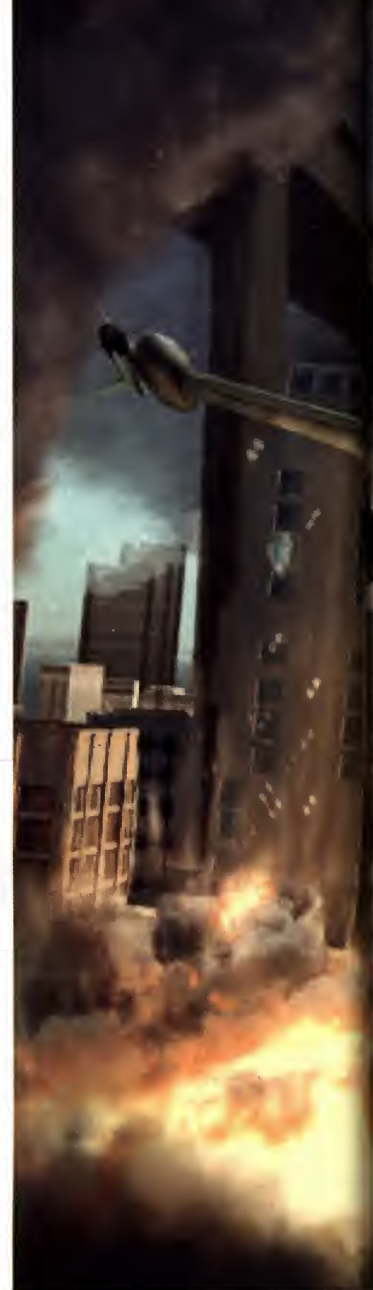
HOW IT STACKS

**TOM CLANCY'S
H.A.W.X.** 70%
**BLAZING ANGELS: SECRET
MISSIONS OF WWII** 66%
**BLAZING ANGELS:
SQUADRONS OF WWII** 59%

PINPOINTING THE MOMENT in *HAWX* where the last vestiges of haughty simulation fall away to reveal the chuckling figure of an arcade game is easy: it's when your flight instructor tells you that by turning off your on-board computer, you can do skids in the sky. And that, if you're being chased by an enemy jet, you can slam on the breaks to do a 180° backflip so you're flying in reverse, facing and locking on to the surprised enemy.

You just don't get flying games like this on PC, ones that skirt so closely to

the ridiculous while remaining eminently enjoyable and constantly fun. What *HAWX* offers is a simple, incredibly slick experience, a series of 19 varied and creative missions backed up by a surprisingly robust and involving Tom Clancy-esque plot. The controls will grate at first, as, unknown to you, they're deliberately made to feel clunky and semi-responsive. The first 10 minutes are akin to playing a game from across the room by poking at it with a broom handle. Put a few missions behind you though, and you unlock the on-board computer's off button.



With the off switch flicked, the HUD is reduced, the safety systems are put out of commission (meaning you can stall if you slow down too much), and the camera pulls way back – too far back – to give you a better look at what's going on around you. In this mode, the plane becomes a twitchy dart capable of the tighter turns needed to get a lock onto the faster, more agile targets you'll encounter. Otherwise you'll be flying with your killjoy systems on, with a kind of responsiveness that becomes more amiable the more you play.

TOP GUNNING

HAWX departs from other arcade flying games in its neon light parade, the glowing visual aids decorating your heads-up display. The Enhanced Reality System guides you to targets, and at a touch it can generate a suggested path to bring you into the best firing position. *Pilotwings*-style gates hang in the sky for you to fly through. For ground targets, especially those in narrow city streets, it'll have you arcing up and over before



PRANDTL-GLAUERT SINGULARITIES

Pffft, well at least Ubisoft got something right...

Fans of Prandtl-Glauert singularities will be pleased with *HAWX*. Whereas even hardcore fighter jet sims like *Lock-On* neglect to include the distinct vapour cone, which occurs when travelling at a particular velocity at which a sudden drop in air pressure occurs. Though it's often debated, it's generally accepted that this drop is the cause of the visible condensation cloud that surrounds an aircraft travelling at transonic speeds. And let's be honest, you'd have to be some sort of wanker to think that vapour cones could be caused by anything other than a sudden drop in air pressure. So don't come here rocking the Prandtl-Glauert singularity boat with your off-the-wall theories.



coming straight down towards the exposed enemy.

Spangly, glittery techno-porn that may be, but outside the city streets example I just related it's a fairly useless feature. You'll be left slowly threading your way through clouds for up to 20 seconds at a time, when dropping into 'assistance off' mode and doing a backflip will get the job done in three.

There are a few other problems too. Ubisoft Romania have struck a deal with "innovative geospatial products and solutions provider" GeoEye (geoeye.com), which gives the game's terrain a realistic edge (given that it is, in effect, photos of real places).

The world feels terribly scaled down though, and while the combat arena is massive you often feel like you're flying around a shrunken world. Bring your plane down to ground level and the effect is far more pronounced – your jet must be half a mile long, your wings could scythe through mountains. That is, admittedly, a side-effect of my love of real, proper flight sims. To have a world to scale would slow things down to a relative crawl, and *HAWX* is all about speed and wanton bravado.

Elsewhere, there's no real difference in the huge array of planes you gradually unlock as the game moves forward. Weapon load-outs can be customised,

though you're restricted in what you can play with early on, making the armoury rather prescribed for the first half of the game. The squad control is simplistic too, with commands to either send your wingmen forth or reel them back in to cover your arse. You can shout at them too if you've got a mic, which is an undeniably nice touch.

Everything else about the game is immensely satisfying. Watching red diamonds skitter about the HUD in search of targets on the horizon, releasing a flock of air-to-air missiles which spiral into the distance on a carriage of billowing, snaking smoke. Screaming through the resulting fireball at twice the speed of sound, turning

sharply to line up the next target. It's giddy, hyperactive, silly fun.

HAWX is more Charlie Sheen than Tom Cruise. A vaguely comical arcade shooter in the clouds, and one that never pretends to be anything else. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Gorgeous
SOUND Booming
MULTIPLAYER Four-way co-op

- ✓ Barmy action funtimes
- ✓ Loads and loads of planes
- ✓ Nice crossover with *GRW* and *EndWar*
- ✗ No difference in planes
- ✗ Not much depth



70

Head in the clouds



STORMRISE

The eye of a storm is eerily quiet, unlike *David Brown* who's just eerie

DEVELOPER Creative Assembly
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE sega.co.uk/stormrise
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY HAVE been at the summit of real-time strategy gaming ever since *Shogun: Total War* burst forth nearly a decade ago. Synonymous with PC gaming, it seems the time has come for the company to devote some of its resources to breaking into new areas, namely action-oriented console games with the most hideous control method ever devised.

SHADES OF GREY

Although *Stormrise*'s control system was developed for consoles it's by no means accessible. CA have comprehensively failed to create a scheme that will work on control pads or mice.

Before we descend into the madness that is Whip Select, let's look at the game itself. The setting is post-apocalyptic, with two factions emerging from the wreckage of a devastated world. The Echelon are machine-oriented humans, while the Sai (who have rejected mechanistic doctrine)



Capture power nodes to gain resources.

base their forces on organic units and various mutated creatures. The game's main Story mode sees you start off as a character named Geary, who is dropped into a big stompy mech. These machines are the Echelon's commanders, with the rest of the army formed by infantry, large vehicles/creatures or airborne units/flying dragon-type things.

The Sai's bestiary is fun to observe initially. The Matriarch spider is pretty

funky, for example, but once you realise there are only two factions, and that there aren't actually that many units to choose from anyway, the novelty value of commanding mutants fades sooner than a knock-off band T-shirt. There's also the fact that there are a number of units you'll just never use, as CA haven't balanced them properly. So you'll be seeing a lot of the same type of units and, annoyingly, you'll also be seeing

AT A GLANCE...

Creative Assembly broaden their strategy horizons, trying to dominate the console market with a new control system designed for pads.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 Windows Vista (Service Pack 1),
 2.8GHz dual-core CPU, 1GB RAM,
 9GB HDD space, and an N8800 or
 A4850 series graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

RED ALERT 3 **86%**

DAWN OF WAR II **78%**

STORMRISE **48%**

BESTIAL DEVASTATION

The creatures the Sai count on in battle



The Sai (the supposedly evil faction) have access to a number of disfigured and mutated beasts.

The Matriarch Spider (left) is perhaps the most impressive of these, although the dragon-like creatures that fly over the map, spewing energy blasts onto hapless troops below, are impressive. In fact, they are much better for viewing the progress of a battle than the terrible strategic map provided. They're certainly more fun to control than the Echelon's mech commanders you'll start the game off with – mainly because the camera doesn't interfere as much with what you're trying to do.



Confusingly, *Stormrise* looks better in stills than when running.

"The Whip Select control interface is bloody excruciating"

them on very similar battle landscapes. A lot of browns and greys are on display and, while some of the maps are plenty of fun (the urban one with a big hole in the middle is a particular favourite) just as many are pretty drab and difficult to navigate.

CRACK-A-WAY

One of the reasons the maps are hard to navigate is that the Whip Select interface is so bloody excruciating.

To select a unit you need to hold down the right mouse button, drag towards the unit of your choice and then release. In theory and when no pressure is put on the player, it does work. Sadly, virtually the second you build up a decent force or expand your territory (defined by control of resource points, *Dawn of War II*-style) you will start cursing the Whip. A lot. The thing is, as far as I could determine, you can't free-roam around the map, so you're stuck viewing the action from the perspective of one unit. This wouldn't be so bad

if you had more control over the camera, but usually when you whip select over to one of your force, the camera fixes itself at an incredibly awkward angle.

Once it has done this, it's a struggle to move it into a more manageable position. By then, you've lagged up to 10 seconds behind the action. In a fast-paced game, this is unforgivable. Couple this with the fact that the maximum size of a squad is three (again, at least as far as I could determine), you'll have lots of small groups – which you can't assign quick-select numbers to – spread out all over the place.



Admittedly, these things are cool.

The worst thing about the interface is when you want to pick a unit that's a reasonable distance away. You'll, stupidly, have to guess which one it is from a mass of bunched icons. Virtually every time, unless you get lucky, you'll pick the wrong unit. It is just a total mess, using pad or mouse.

EASY SCRAPs

There are saving graces in the form of the options for single-player Skirmish battles and, to a lesser extent, the online multiplayer games. That's if you can put up with *Games For Windows – LIVE!*, which MP games are run through. Skirmish, especially when you whack up the maximum number of AI units allowed, is much easier to get to grips with than the campaign missions. Online

you'll certainly come up against spam-attack rushers, but you can set the pace of battle yourself in Skirmish. Even Whip Select doesn't seem so bad.

Other than that, the only things you'll get out of *Stormrise* are a headache and a stress-related heart attack from trying to select a unit. An RTS where the hardest thing is selecting your men – imagine that. **PCZ**



Shin spikes straight out of a Scandinavian black metal band.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Surprisingly weak
SOUND Annoying voiceovers
MULTIPLAYER The one saving grace

- ✓ Skirmish and multiplayer is good
- ✓ Mechs
- ✗ Graphically weak
- ✗ GFWL-based multiplayer
- ✗ Hateful characters

48

Thoroughly whipped



FALLOUT 3: THE PITT



Take a visit to hospitable Pennsylvania with **Ed Zitron**

DEVELOPER Bethesda
PUBLISHER Games For
Windows – LIVE!
WEBSITE [tinyurl.com/
thepittexpansion](http://tinyurl.com/thepittexpansion)
ETA Out now
PRICE 800 Microsoft
Points (£7.50)

AT A GLANCE...

While it's a huge improvement over the execrable *Operation Anchorage* DLC, *The Pitt* doesn't add much to *Fallout 3* beyond another quest.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista), and a 256MB video card.
Internet connection required.

HOW IT STACKS

OBLIVION: THE SHIVERING ISLES **87%**

FALLOUT 3: THE PITT **70%**

FALLOUT 3: PROJECT ANCHORAGE **44%**

YOU HAVE TO hand it to Bethesda – they've chosen a part of the US that really lends itself to surviving a nuclear apocalypse seemingly unscathed. That, and getting the designers of *The Pitt* to actually play *Fallout 3* all the way through, so they could get a feel for what people might want to play.

The Pitt is set in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – an already desolate city, made only slightly worse by the fallout, that is overrun by raiders. Said raiders have enslaved members of *The Pitt*'s population who haven't been infected by a virus that turns them into trogs – mutated humans who live underground.

You're lured there by a chap called Wernher, who has escaped the city in an attempt to find help – and a cure to the

plague that he's certain the city's owners possess.

This leads you to mucking in as a slave, and one of the few missteps of the expansion. Bethesda needs to allow players to take all their gear into expansion content. Even if you walk in and shoot down all of the guards, you're powerless to stop three sissy-boys from clubbing you unconscious and removing your gear. Frankly, this is insulting – I still have my power armour from Anchorage, and I want to use it.

THE PITTS

Despite this, *The Pitt* is a functional and enjoyable expansion. It condenses and presents its own version of *Oblivion*'s arena as The Hole, and the new weapons (especially the AutoAxe, a one-handed chainsaw-thing) are great fun to use. The quest itself fails to enthrall, though – you'll beat it for the sake of beating it, as it's easy and short (about four hours long) and fun enough, but it fails to excite. Even the big secret and the big decision you make at the end are as predictable as they come.

Also, the last time I checked, Pittsburgh covers an area of 58 square miles, not a set of claustrophobic corridors and a large courtyard.

The Pitt is good fun, if a little short for the money. What *Fallout 3* needs is an expansion like *The Shivering Isles*, with real meat to it. For now, you'll have to make do with this – a good, but short and somewhat bland extra mission. **PCZ**



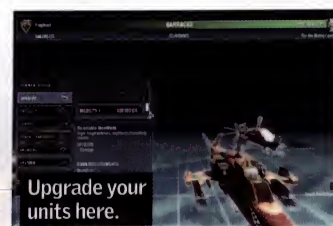
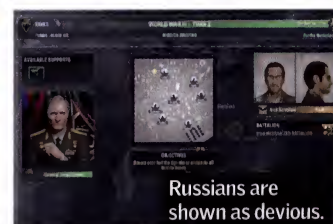
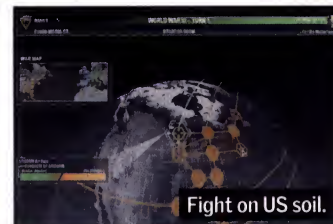
PCZONE

GRAPHICS *Fallout 3*
SOUND *Fallout 3*
MULTIPLAYER No

- ✓ Fun while it lasts
- ✓ The Hole is great
- ✓ Non-linear
- ✗ Short
- ✗ Not as good as the original

70
A step in the right direction

One early mission sees you defending Moscow from an Europa attack.



TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR

David Brown doesn't like the sound of his own voice at all

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Shanghai
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE endwargame.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out Now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

Modern RTS that uses the power of the voice to control your units, set against the backdrop of World War III.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E4400/3GHz AMD Athlon 64 X2 Dual Core or better, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista), and a 256MB graphics card (Shader Model 3.0 required).

HOW IT STACKS

COMPANY OF HEROES	93%
WORLD IN CONFLICT	92%
ENDWAR	68%

THE VOICE RECOGNITION trainer in *EndWar* is the most fiddly piece of crap I've met. I actually skipped it, because it failed to recognise my commands, even though my voice was registering right in the optimum zone the whole time. This left me seriously worried about how this device would work in the game, if it wouldn't work during setup.

Luckily, *EndWar*'s gimmick works far more smoothly than the ghastly calibration process suggests. Basically, you can take (almost) complete control over your units by speaking, and only a very minimal reference to the keyboard and mouse is needed. But as with any gimmick, it doesn't work out like that. When it works, it really feels fluid and you can get into a good tactical rhythm. You can also take a step back from the front line and view things in a more detached manner.



That's if the camera lets you. Sometimes it gets itself in curious positions, which makes giving verbal orders difficult. When things get a bit tricky, you'll revert back to traditional point-and-click RTS mannerisms. In fact, it's possible to avoid the voice commands altogether.

TINY FORCES

As for why you're playing the game, *EndWar* is a relatively traditional modern RTS in the *World in Conflict* mould, set against the usual *Tom Clancy* brand backdrop of US Neo-Con politics (everyone's against the US; the Russians are devious bastards; and Europe is a unified superpower). Various events bring on World War III, as the fight for fuel reserves brims over into all-out conflict. You even get to use weapons of mass destruction, presumably the ones found in Saddam Hussein's Iraq (cough).

You take control of a small battalion of forces in any set battle. You have, at most, six or seven units, including choppers, tanks, transports and infantry. Others become available later, but you'll definitely be relying on a few core units. Pick one of the factions and run through the semi-linear campaign to determine who wins the war. Simple.

While the missions are varied, the manner in which you finish them won't be. *EndWar*'s is a little too repetitive and you'll probably end up using the same basic strategy in every battle. That said, the game is solid, and voice control has been well implemented, so it'll be interesting to see where Ubisoft go with it in the future. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Average
SOUND Voice control works well
MULTIPLAYER Decent number of options

- ✓ Voice command system
- ✓ Reasonable visuals
- ✓ Decent multiplayer
- ✗ Terrible voice calibration
- ✗ Repetitive action
- ✗ Stupid politics

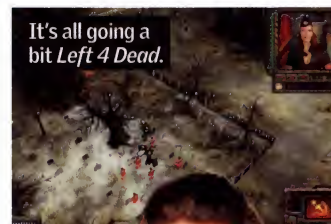
68
Not great



Everything's just so nauseatingly clean...



Cryo-commanders sound like Arnold Schwarzenegger as Mr. Freeze.



It's all going a bit Left 4 Dead.



RED ALERT 3: UPRISING

Chris Capel hates on some Commies

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE commandandconquer.com/redalert3
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99 (download only)

AT A GLANCE...

Expansion pack for the time-travellin' bear-baitin' historian-hatin' Commie-'em-up, *Red Alert 3*. Now with added Ric Flair!

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.2GHz processor (2.6GHz Vista),
1GB RAM, GeForce6800 or Radeon
X800 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

RED ALERT 3 86%

RA3: UPRISING 84%

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: KANE'S WRATH 82%

FOR AN EXPANSION pack, *Red Alert 3: Uprising* has a lot of new content. If you're expecting just a few missions and maybe a couple of extra units, prepare your gobs for some true smacking.

Most stunningly, and I'm sure this will make or break opinions of this stand-alone add-on, there's no co-op campaign play. Online co-op was the big new feature of *RA3* and it's been totally axed here. On the upside this makes *Uprising* feel like classic *Red Alert*. On the downside, it's just not *Red Alert 3*.

Despite that, the challenge some felt was absent in *RA3* returns when you don't have a co-commander fighting with you. There are four campaigns, one for each faction, and another where you play as psychic schoolgirl Yuri Omega.

The Yuri Omega campaign plays more like an RPG, although Yuri Omega doesn't level up by killing enemies; instead she studies computers (inevitably there's one PC that's just full of porn). This storyline is entertaining, as bouncing dolphins off aircraft carriers always is, and is a good complement to the main campaigns.

There are only a few campaign maps for each side, but they take several hours, and lots of unit management, to complete. As for new units, the Soviets get stiffed, with only old favourites the Desolator and Grinders being useful, while the Allies get the Harbinger Gunships and Pacifiers, both of which are hard to take out and devastating powerful. The Empire gets a floating giant robot samurai head, which is great fun but takes a long time to build.

TOUGH GOING

And after that, there's the Challenge mode, which is basically one giant non-linear campaign with no difficulty settings, all three sides and no saving (what?!). As you complete missions you gain extra units and more choice over the next. Unlike in previous EA RTS games, this extra mode has had as much work put into it as the main campaign, and while the lack of a save is a bit annoying, we can't fault the enjoyment factor.

When judging *Uprising*, the question is whether the lack of co-op ruins it. For me it didn't, but for some people it will; although they may be sated by the Skirmish play options. Then again, some really disliked the co-op aspect of *RA3*, so for those *Uprising* will be an improvement. Even the visuals are more colourful and detailed. And it's got Ric Flair and Malcolm McDowell in it. Can you say no to that? **PCZ**

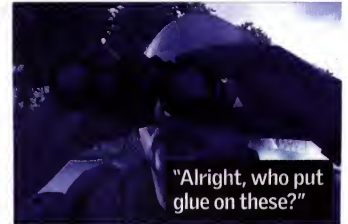
Sorry luv, but you're no Ric Flair.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Colourful and detailed
SOUND Music great, voices fun
MULTIPLAYER Skirmishes, but no campaign co-op

- ✓ Plenty to do
- ✓ Challenging but not infuriating
- ✓ Flair! McDowell!
- ✗ Limited co-op
- ✗ No Tim Curry

84
Flair-tastic



WORLD IN CONFLICT: SOVIET ASSAULT

Commie *David Brown* smashes some capitalist dogs



DEVELOPER Massive Entertainment
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE worldinconflict.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out Now
PRICE £9.99 (Steam), £19.99 (Complete Edition)

AT A GLANCE...

The expansion that does what it says, increasing the main campaign with new Soviet-oriented material.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2GHz processor (2.2GHz Vista), 512MB RAM (1GB Vista), 128MB graphics card. *World in Conflict* required.

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD IN CONFLICT	92%
WORLD IN CONFLICT: SOVIET ASSAULT	78%
ENDWAR	68%

THIS IS THE purest example of an expansion, because it does just that: it expands *World in Conflict*'s campaign with six missions. These aren't bolted-on afterthoughts; they bring humanity to the faceless Commies you were blasting in the main game.

The ability to take the role of the Soviets doesn't change how the game plays at all. The majority of fans will be lapping this expansion up, although no doubt there'll be a minority who might bemoan the lack of real progress made by Massive. This, of course, is pretty much the case with every expansion.

Along with six new single-player missions, two new multiplayer maps have been added. The single-player additions weave a Soviet-oriented story around the main US one, telling us what the invaders are thinking, doing and feeling. This side of the story is dramatic and even *WIC* veterans will find it worth their while to see how events progress.

The first mission shows how the Soviets started the war, by sneaking a team of Spetsnaz (Soviet special forces)

into a NATO command post in West Berlin, prior to invading. This mission is a great introduction for new players, as the battle is exciting without forcing the player to work too hard to win. Players with a bit of experience will be all over it within seconds, but as an introductory level, it does its job superbly. Things then move back into familiar territory with the invasion of Seattle signalling the beginning of the US campaign.

SALES PROBLEM

The multiplayer side has been left pretty much intact, with a few minor but no major changes being made. The new maps are interesting, and bring the total number of official ones to 25.

There's only one problem with this expansion: buying it. In the UK *Soviet Assault* is only available with the main game, in *World in Conflict: Complete Edition*. Even Amazon and Play.com only sell *WIC:CE*, leaving Steam and Direct2Drive the only outlets selling *Soviet Assault* solo. If you know who at Ubisoft is to blame for this decision, let us know so we can berate them.

While we are recommending this expansion because it fleshes out the original and gives it a fresh perspective, it doesn't contain anything that will cause previously unconvinced players to get involved. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Still looks good
SOUND Voiceovers aren't annoying
MULTIPLAYER Same as before

- ✓ Explosive action-strategy
- ✓ Humanises the Soviets
- ✓ Low price
- ✗ No evolution
- ✗ Expansion not sold in stores

78
 More Khrushchev than Lenin



WALLACE & GROMIT'S GRAND ADVENTURES: FRIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEES

Will David Brown adore these plasticene heroes?

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com
ETA Out Now
PRICE \$34.99 (approx £24)



AT A GLANCE...

Nick Park's most famous creations finally get the proper gaming treatment they deserve, courtesy of the Telltale team. Hurrah!

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB DirectX 9.1-compliant video card.

HOW IT STACKS

SAM AND MAX 2.05: WHAT'S NEW, BEELZEBUB? **84%**
STRONG BAD 1.01: HOMESTAR RUINER **80%**
WALLACE & GROMIT 1.01: FRIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEES **79%**

LET'S START WITH a confession: while I've got nothing against Nick Park's bumbling inventor and his canine pal, I'm not a fan. I've barely ever watched any of the shows or the film. This means I'm coming to this as a Gromit virgin, as it were. Well, let's face it, fans of the show will be buying this whatever I say. Is it not more worthwhile to see whether non-fans would be interested too?

Fright of the Bumblebees is the first of four adventures coming to us from the capable hands of Telltale Games, them of episodic adventure gaming fame. As with their other recent titles (*Sam & Max* and *Strong Bad*) each game can easily be finished in an evening. *Fright of the Bumblebees* is just as good as their other games for providing that "one whole evening's entertainment" fix. My own limited knowledge of the franchise tells me Telltale have nailed the feel of the original source material, with even Peter Sallis' understudy providing a more-than-passable impression of everyone's favourite *Summer Wine*-r.

So, as the voices don't make your teeth itch, this means that one of the three comedy adventure game core components is present and correct. The other two are whether the game's

puzzles are good and whether the jokes are funny. The former are solid, never too difficult and always reasonably logical. There is an issue with the in-game hint system occasionally interfering with conversations, but just turning it down a bit solves this.

LACK OF SNIGGERS

The comedy isn't such a strong suit. The self-proclaimed "massive fan" sitting nearby tells me that *Bumblebees* doesn't hit the heights of the source material. Don't get me wrong – I never winced at bad jokes, but not once was I moved to more than a mild grin. This is one area where how much of a fan you are really does become important. The game's authentic, but is it funny? The answer to this is more subjective than usual.

The only other issue we had was with the controls, which were akin to *Grim Fandango* – use the WSAD keys to

move around, the mouse to interact. It is done well, but, again, it's a matter of taste whether you like it. On the whole, a very solid start to the series.

We should also add a word about the price. Unlike their other episodic games, Telltale aren't making the *Wallace & Gromit* games available individually. So your £24 will get you all four, delivered to your PC once a month, but if you only want one, you're out of luck. **PC7**

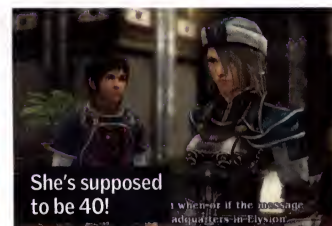
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Authentic to the original shows and movie
SOUND Good voice-acting
MULTIPLAYER You're kidding...

- ✓ Peter Sallis isn't missed
- ✓ Good puzzles
- ✓ Very authentic
- ✓ Fans will love it
- ✗ Is it funny?
- ✗ Controls could be a problem



79
Promising start



THE LAST REMNANT

Adam Glick has spiky hair and likes wielding his big sword

DEVELOPER Square Enix
PUBLISHER Square Enix/Steam
WEBSITE na.square-enix.com/remnant
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

The latest game from the makers of *Final Fantasy* offers a traditional take on the JRPG genre, powered by Unreal Engine 3.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2GHz Core 2 Duo processor, 1.5GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card. Internet connection required.

HOW IT STACKS

FINAL FANTASY VIII 83%
FINAL FANTASY ONLINE 81%
THE LAST REMNANT 52%

THE FIRST THINGS that'll strike you about *The Last Remnant*, after its perplexingly long install process on Steam has completed, is that the menu system is a confusing mess.

All the information is there, but navigating is a pain in the posterior. I even resorted to plugging in an Xbox 360 pad, which promptly failed to work. Finally I found all the options I wanted and there was an intriguing nugget hidden away in the clutter: you can play this JRPG in Japanese with English subtitles.

The plot of *The Last Remnant* runs thus: you play Rush Sykes, whose sister has been spirited off by some ne'er-do-wells, leaving only her magic talisman behind. Determined to rescue her, Rush embarks on a quest accompanied by various creatures and characters that range from normal to downright bonkers – it's your basic Japanese RPG.

Sadly, the game never really manages to be anything

other than average, even with the speed and graphical improvements made since the console version was released to near universal contempt. Even though *Remnant* is powered by Epic's Unreal Engine 3, it looks rosey. Now, we're not saying that graphics mean that much, but when the gameplay can't make up for a lack of flair in the visuals, you're in trouble. The root cause of the problem is that the combat is just plain dull. It's also both baffling and very simplistic at the same time.

Your forces are split into unions, made up of a small number of characters at a time. Each union can be given individual orders – attack, heal, back up allies and so on – and you can see the potential for some decent strategic gameplay. Sadly, the execution is confusing and sometimes, it seems, rather arbitrary. Often, you choose to attack and your men are the ones who take damage first. All sorts of things are going on and you are never sure whether it was you who made them happen or if they'd have just taken place anyway. Couple this with the fact

you'll be doing a hell of a lot of it and you've got a recipe for boredom.

Numerous other problems with *The Last Remnant* include unskippable cutscenes, confusing union creation systems, dreary locations, an auto save slot that doesn't get used, awful music, no voices outside of cutscenes, to name but a few. But, this is an improvement over the console version. **PC7**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Frankly, they're poor
SOUND Japanese voices, shite music
MULTIPLAYER Nope

- ✓ Japanese voice acting
- ✓ Better than the console
- ✗ Dull combat
- ✗ Poor graphics
- ✗ Unskippable cut-scenes

52
 Flaccid

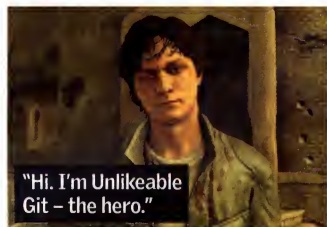


WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE

Angelina's nowhere to be seen

DEVELOPER GRIN
PUBLISHER Warner Bros
WEBSITE thewanted.warnerbros.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.33GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6540 (or equiv),
1GB RAM, and a GeForce 8 (or equiv)
graphics card, with Shader Model 3.0.



THERE'S AT LEAST one bit in *Wanted* where the main character (who has to be one of the least sympathetic in recent memory) is engaged in a gun battle with a policeman carrying a riot shield. Both of them are firing pot shots at each other and, when the camera pans out, you notice they are about a yard apart. You can only think the developers, GRIN, had been watching *Police Squad* while putting that scene together.

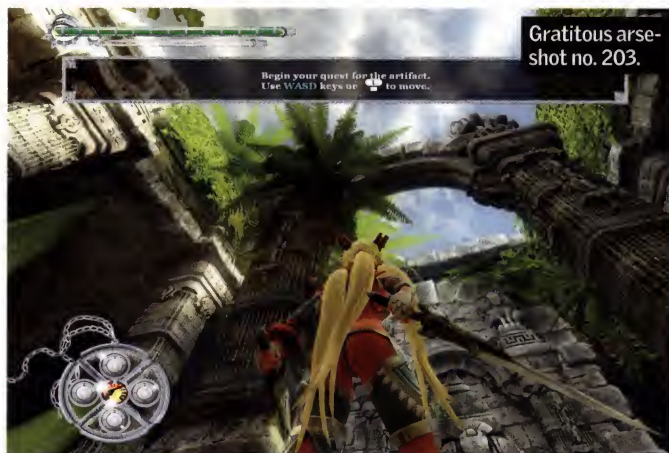
In some ways, this typifies *Wanted*. It's reasonably good fun at times, with the combat flowing well as you dive into and out of cover. Even the quick-time events are interesting – you get a semi-interactive cutscene, where the action pauses and you are given a couple of seconds to hit some targets. However, in general the game has more misses than hits. For a start, there's the plot, which is far too disjointed to

drag the player in, and it never really explains what the hell is going on.

The combat is, despite flowing well, incredibly and utterly console. Most of the time you won't actually move your character around, you'll just be shifting between different cover areas. You can do this quickly and, when using the mouse and keys, combat can be very stylish, but in the end, it is effectively on rails.

There are a lot of other things wrong with the game that would take me over the word limit, like the forced grittiness of the dialogue (ie they swear a lot), but despite all this, *Wanted* is actually fun. Extraordinarily basic consolised fun, but fun. It's also far too expensive, considering there's only three hours of play here. Some might argue that making it any longer would make the experience worse, but a line has to be drawn somewhere.

David Brown



X-BLADES

Oh, the cheek of it!



DEVELOPER Gaijin Entertainment
PUBLISHER Southpeak Games
WEBSITE x-blades.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a
256MB graphics card.



TO SAY I'M underwhelmed by *X-Blades* is a huge exaggeration. Some passers-by even laughed at me while I was playing it. Is that the reaction developers Gaijin would have wanted to elicit from people? The whole thing is just, well, naff. You play a girl (for she clearly doesn't look old enough to be called an adult) who likes to explore ancient ruins for artifacts, while wearing virtually nothing. Seriously, if this wasn't related to a game, you might be arrested for looking at pictures of the main character online.

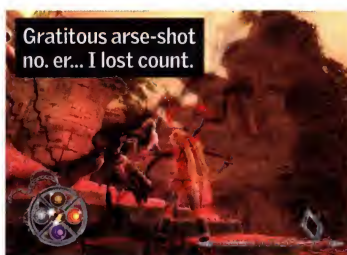
Your character's name is Ayumi, even though she doesn't look Japanese or even vaguely Oriental. In fact, her voice is something you might expect in a US teen comedy. The only thing missing is the "like, you know, whatever" line every two seconds. She starts off looking for an artifact of 'unimaginable power', but things change quickly. On her quest, she must

fight thousands upon thousands of enemies, who spawn and rush her almost constantly. There are a lot of enemies, but you won't really care, as you'll have fallen into a coma from clicking the mouse so many times.

To add some variety, you can purchase skills and so on using the in-game currency: souls. Kill enemies and you assimilate their souls, which you can then spend on new abilities. These are actually vital to succeeding, as some enemies can only be defeated by certain types of magic (dark, fire, ice and so on). Despite this, there is virtually no depth to the combat at all, just click, click, click, press Q, click, click, jump and repeat.

There's really no reason you'd want to play this, unless you like looking at the pert buttocks of a young girl while clicking the mouse button a thousand times a minute. We're a permissive bunch really, but this strays too far into Gary Glitter's territory for comfort.

David Brown





Match three or more mines to damage the enemy.

PUZZLE QUEST: GALACTRIX

Gem-matching takes to the stars

DEVELOPER Infinite Interactive
PUBLISHER D3 Publisher/Steam
WEBSITE puzzle-quest.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £15.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.8GHz Core 2 processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.



Explore the galaxy.

FOR THOSE OF you who don't remember the original *Puzzle Quest*, it involved a story mode which progressed by means of a gem-matching game mechanic. When you wanted to advance the story, you'd complete a mission by beating the AI at a *Bejewelled*-style game, where you'd match three or more gems of the same colour. In *Puzzle Quest: Galactrix*, this takes place in a world of lasers, spaceships and aliens.

I'll admit to not being a fan of Match-3 games, but *Galactrix* has grown on me by injecting just enough in the way of features to keep things interesting. For a start, there's the fact you are fighting against an enemy. As well as gems, there are mines which, when matched, cause damage to the opponent's ship's shields. When the shields are depleted, the hull of the enemy vessel is damaged. Remove all the hull points and you win.

Blue gems restore your shields when matched, while red, yellow and green ones increase your three abilities, which include weapons and engineering. As you progress, you gain more potent skills to use, which require certain prerequisite scores in these three categories. Early on in the game, you'll be wondering why you would ever need to bother matching these gems, but in the latter stages, they become vital.

The story mode also allows you to mine asteroids, craft items, haggle over trade (you sell things taken from defeated enemies or mining operations) and then there's the multiplayer. This will be where the longevity of the game lies, but the interface provided is clumsy and doesn't make looking for matches easy at all. All in all, though, this is a worthy follow-up and well worth your time if you are an enthusiast of the gem-matching genre.

David Brown



Easy lesbian joke avoided.



Maw is, admittedly, very cute.

THE MAW

The only thing with a bigger appetite than Mr Creosote

DEVELOPER Twisted Pixel Games
PUBLISHER Hothead Games/Steam
WEBSITE mawgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £8.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.



This mutation shoots lasers.

MOST OF MY time away from work is spent stuffing my face with crisps, cakes, biscuits and red meat, so I was clearly the obvious choice to review a game that involves a large, pink gelatinous blob devouring everything in sight. *The Maw* is a platform-cum-puzzle game that involves you taking control of a timid alien creature – Frank – who's captured by some bounty hunters. The spaceship he's on crashes and he escapes the rubble intact, along with the titular Maw itself.

Teaming up, they have to traverse a very colourful landscape full of strange creatures and, later on, the bounty hunters. The main premise of the game is for you to guide the Maw to sources of food using a plasma leash, which can also be used to manipulate other creatures and objects in the game world. The more food the Maw devours, the bigger he grows. There are also

special animals that cause him to mutate for the duration of a level when eaten. This allows you to clear obstacles and solve puzzles on each stage.

Essentially, *The Maw* is a mixture of puzzle solving and platform jumping, that has a wonderful personality to it and a great premise in the Maw itself. Let's not also forget that this has been made by an independent developer. However, the question of longevity has to be addressed and, sadly, this is where the game comes up mightily short (literally). The game is less than a tenner on Steam and that's probably the perfect price for it, given the few hours you get out of it. Even *The Maw's* DLC (*Brute Force* and *River Redirect*, which cost less than a quid each) don't add much to the main game.

Treat *The Maw* as a casual half hour game and you'll be well satisfied, but don't expect any maw than that. Sorry. David Brown



Freak on a leash.



State of Play

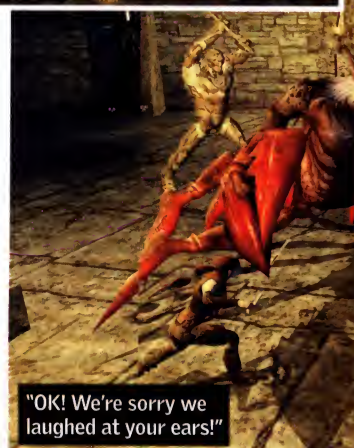
Every month we cast fresh eyes over the changes made to long-running games...



Is it considered a cliché if it's in a *D&D* game?



Needs a bit more bloom.



"OK! We're sorry we laughed at your ears!"

THIS MONTH...

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE: STORMREACH

PUBLISHER Turbine Games WEBSITE ddo-europe.com PRICE €20/£18 then €15/month (£14)

IN A YEAR that's seen the end of *Tabula Rasa*, a much-loved and desperately original MMO, it's sad to begin writing about *D&D Online*. You see, it's never been the popular kid at school – in fact it's always been the bullied one, shoved in the corner by *World of Warcraft*, *EverQuest II*, and even its big brother *Lord of the Rings Online*. *DDO* has gone through the most dire of straits, and I can't honestly say how long it's going to last.

Since its launch around three years ago – respectable, considering its obscurity – Turbine have had to downsize *DDO*'s servers from the original 14 in the USA and five in Europe, to a mere seven

worldwide, only two of which are for players in Europe. While this is positive, in that it's now easier to find groups than it was only shortly after release, this may mean *DDO* is at death's door.

The game itself has never really pleased its core markets. Traditional *Dungeons & Dragons* players have flapped their bingo wings at its lack of faith to the source material, claiming that combat is not enough like an actual *D&D* game, and MMO fans didn't like the quasi-real-time combat, the lack of soloing, combat difficulty, slow levelling and lack of a gigantic, immersive world to draw them in every day. In fact, the game's audience has always been slightly

unclear: too obscure for the MMO-maniac, and not open enough for the average Monster Munch-fingered *D&D* fan. These criticisms aside, since its launch the game has become deeper and more playable for anyone willing to give it a try, but the lack of a core audience has embittered the experience.

THE DYING GAME

While you could always choose the solo difficulty for encounters, they initially penalised you so much that they were pointless. Turbine have since revamped soloing, making it a little more viable for those of us lonely enough to want to play an MMO on their own. In fact, the

experience is a lot more visceral than *Warhammer* and *WOW*, with far more enjoyable twitch-combat than any MMO involving unsubtle womanising and men with their shirts ripped off.

Gloom and doom aside, there are certainly positive elements to *DDO*'s current state. Servers are stable, and finding a group of players is reasonably easy (especially in comparison to *Warhammer*, as of going to press). That, and the current dedicated fans, as tends to happen with Turbine's MMOs (just look at *LOTRO* and *Asheron's Call*) are pleasant, talented, and willing to help new players adjust to a slightly quirky gameworld. They also know their stuff – for the most part, you're dealing with people who are re-playing content for fun, and thus won't sit around typing "how do I shot arrow" as you're violated by kobolds.

Turbine are also finally finishing the levelling curve, most likely just before you read this, which will allow players to

The Mysterons found work in MMOs.



"With the smoking ban, I have to go to another dimension for a fag."

reach level 20. This means there's bound to be a surge of older players either returning to the game or playing with a renewed vigour, and in general might spark a bit of returned interest from both the press and newer players, especially considering the free trial.

The biggest problem with *DDO*: *Stormreach* is, for the most part, it's obviously not going anywhere. I'd be very surprised to see it live past 2009 in its current form, and with the reported upheavals on the inside midway through development, a lot of the original team has left or been shaken around.

Problematically, the biggest update to the game in months (Module 9) touts account-shared bank tabs as a super-duper new feature. It's hard to garner enthusiasm with players old and new when your major updates suggest that your development team has effectively left the building.

There's a possible market for it as a free-to-play game with real money

transactions, though. We've heard rumblings over the past year this was possibly going into effect, but nothing has come from Turbine's official press machinations. If this were to take place, the game could attract a new breed of moneyed-up MMO-ers, but we'll have to see whether Turbine take *DDO* in that direction – or just cut their losses and shut it down.

That would be a massive shame, because had *DDO* been a little bit tighter, a little bit easier to play at first, it might have held a top-five MMO slot. Sadly, over the years it missed the mark and fell into obscurity, but it may last longer than *Age*

of *Conan* or *Warhammer*. Depending on what happens with *DDO*, we advise you to take a glance – maybe on a trial, or if it ever turns free-to-play. Otherwise, we're not sure where it'll be in a few months – it's all up to Turbine's coffers and their current subscribers. **PCZ**

VERDICT

The future is murky for Turbine's most bizarre MMO, and while far from awful, it's hard to recommend the game in today's unstable market.

Ed Zitron

THE STORY SO FAR... THE LIFE AND TIMES OF DDO



2004 PREPARATION

DDO begins development under the eyes of Jeff Anderson, Jason Booth, and Wizards of the Coast.

2006 THE ELVES ARRIVE

DDO: Stormreach is released by Turbine in the US, and joins Codemasters Online Gaming's UK battalion of MMOs.



MAY 2006 LIZARD

Turbine release the first major (and free) update for *DDO*, introducing the Dragon's Vault: surprisingly enough a dungeon with a big red dragon in it.

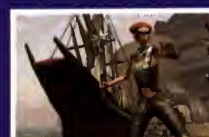
2007 YET MORE ELVES

Turbine release *Lord of the Rings Online*, working with Codemasters (and their Online Gaming wing) to release it to the babbling UK masses.



2007 MUSICAL CHAIRS

Jeff Anderson is displaced as Turbine's CEO, and is replaced with Jim Crowley, in a move that is intended to revitalise the flagging *DDO* franchise.



2009 END OF DAYS?

DDO lets players reach level 20, and eventually hire NPC hirelings (much like *Guild Wars*' guardians) to keep them company on long, lonely nights.

Budget

"Why can't Mastertronic games still come on cheap £2.99 cassette tapes?" wonders *David Brown*



CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £4.88

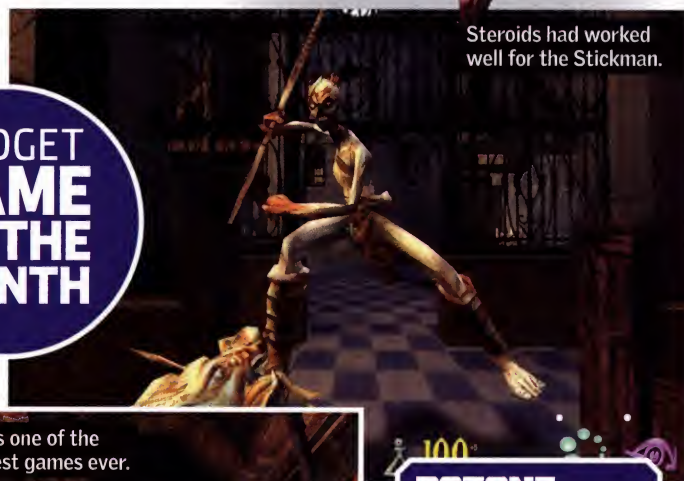
CLIVE BARKER IS probably my favourite horror writer of all time, beating the sometimes racist HP Lovecraft to that most coveted of titles. There's always been something about Barker's utterly macabre visions and concepts that has interested me and *Undying* was simply the gaming resolution to it all. I know there's *Jericho* as well, but that suffered from huge consolitis, despite having so much potential in terms of the scenario and the character-switching abilities, so we'll skip over it.

Undying will always be remembered as Barker's finest computing hour so far, unless you were particularly fond of

the old *Nightbreed* game. Chilling, intriguing and exciting in equal measures, *Undying* and its plot were sadly ignored by the dunderheaded population at large, so only a chosen few felt its awful and horrific majesty.

The game still shines as a beacon of brilliant writing and intelligent game design, but it's looking a bit too ropery nowadays for any massive recommendation. That and the ridiculous number of locked doors still infuriate the hell out of me.

BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH



Steve ignored an invoice for something he doesn't own.
SAVING £32.59



James got a rebate from a train company for them being slow and unreliable.
SAVING £51

Dave ignored the wild boar burger, opting for the chicken satay one instead.
SAVING £2.53



RUNAWAY: A ROAD ADVENTURE

PUBLISHER Good Old Games WEBSITE gog.com PRICE \$9.99 (£7)

RUNAWAY IS ONE of those games that you always mean to play, but never get around to doing so. And, in the end, you kind of wished you hadn't bothered when you do play it.

That's probably a little unfair, but it was never going to be the game that clubbed the public over the head and forced it to take notice of the adventure genre once again. While it doesn't really

do anything wrong, barring some of the worst lip-synching ever committed to our screens (something to do with localisation issues, we believe). The flipside is that it never really does much right either.

While the game is pleasant enough – at no point are you going to slit your own throat in frustration – but there isn't too much to recommend it for.

If you're bored you'll be able to muster up the energy to play *Runaway*, but it really is a game for a rainy Sunday.



ALPHA CENTAURI COMPLETE

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £4.88

SEEN AS EITHER one of the best things Sid Meier ever put his name to or one of the worst, *Alpha Centauri* received 92% in issue 74. Despite receiving widespread praise from media sources, such as this very tome, the public didn't grab this game as much they did the regular *Civilization* series.

The game was certainly ambitious enough: a whole new world to colonise, plus entirely new tech trees to wade through and discover. That being said, that very unique element made the game unfathomable to many players.



With *Civilization*, you know what Writing and Construction means. In *Alpha Centauri*, the science wasn't recognisable and, while those who put the time in found this made no difference, others weren't so ready to put in the hard yards.



Today *Alpha Centauri* is bettered by *Civilization IV* and its mods, as well as *Galactic Civilizations II*.

PCZONE
59

RED ALERT

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £4.88

HOW THE MIGHTY have fallen over time. We gave this a whopping 94% way back in issue 47 and yes, back then it seemed like the best a strategist looking for a bit of fun could get. Sexy commando assassins, rabid guard dogs and a tongue distinctly lodged in a cheek at Westwood's HQ. *Red Alert* is fondly remembered today by RTS fans the world over. Only we're all grown up now and we've had the *Total War* series turn our heads since then.

Nowadays, colourful graphics and armoured bears aren't good enough to get the latest iteration a classic score, so the first one looks decidedly less interesting in comparison. Perhaps it is the fact that all the little flaws you forgot existed would be back with a vengeance – a case of not revisiting the memories of the past, in case you'll find them dashed against the wall and pissed on by a huddled mass of tramps.

Red Alert still does what it did back then, but to be honest, you'd be better off looking at more recent games, even if it is only to avoid the beggar urine gang bang.



PCZONE
65



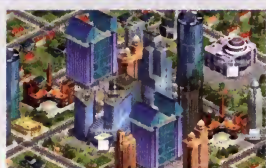
AND THE REST...

The other cheap releases out now



THE GUILD: GOLD EDITION
\$5.99 (£4.25) Good Old Games
This 'life simulation' game was decent in its time, but is outclassed by its recent sequel.

50



CAPITALISM 2
\$5.99 (£4.25) Good Old Games
Ape the despicable money men whose vanity and greed have caused the current recession!

51



PIZZA FRENZY
£9.78 Focus Multimedia
This game isn't as bad as you might think. It's quirky, but lacks a sustained challenge.

60

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



ROME: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION II

PRICE £15, SEGA
Huge-scale RTS warfare at its very finest. Imagine thousands of people beating each other to shit and back.



FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out
With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic
If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse than this epic, sprawling classic.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam
You won't have more fun than this psychological shooter until *Brütal Legend* comes out. If it ever does.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PRICE £5, Sold Out
That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5 LOWEST SCORING GAMES... EVER

- 1 NEWSWEEK 3 GLOBOCOP**
Issue 17, score 0%
- 2 BIG BROTHER: THE GAME**
Issue 96, score 1%
- 3 DEAL OR NO DEAL**
Issue 191, score 3%
- 4 INTERNATIONAL TENNIS**
Issue 42, score 3%
- 5 WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE?**
Issue 96, score 4%



PCZ TOP 5 PC SHOOTER CLICHES

- 1 YOU HAVE NO TONGUE**
You never, ever speak
- 2 EXPLODING BARRELS**
In every FPS since *Doom*
- 3 AMMO DUMPS**
Bullets in bins, cabinets, lockers... everywhere
- 4 BODY LOOTING**
No-one cares if you strip the recently dead of clothes, money and weapons
- 5 GUNS, NO PLASTERS**
You can carry 20 guns, but no first aid kits



PCZ TOP 5 THINGS THAT'LL HAPPEN BEFORE DUKE NUKEM FOREVER IS RELEASED

- 1 JODIE MARSH DISCOVERS A CURE FOR CANCER**
- 2 ROY 'CHUBBY' BROWN BRINGS PEACE TO THE MIDDLE EAST**
- 3 LESBIAN NATIVE AMERICAN IS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE USA**
- 4 SEAN 'DIDDY' COMBS BECOMES POPE BLING I**
- 5 PC ZONE ISSUE 300**



FPS

MUST BUY!



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 - 93%
The only thing the we enjoy more than shooting zombies is shooting zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* has - endless killing of mindlessly murderous plague victims, while you chortle and scream with your buddies.



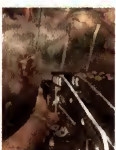
TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



CRYSIS WARHEAD

PCZ Issue: 199 - 92%
This standalone expansion only takes a few hours to complete, but it re-ins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains fantastic action storytelling, and a much improved alien AI.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 - 90%
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

PCZ Issue: 188 - 89%
Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%
This pison of *System Shock 2* will suck you right into its intricate, frightening, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY

MUST BUY!



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 - 94%
Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%
With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%
A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



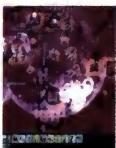
SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 - 91%
This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE

MUST BUY!



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%
We PC users have had to wait a while (OK - we had to wait a bloody age!) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Belic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Belic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%
Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



GEARS OF WAR

PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%
GOW's tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see *GOW2*.



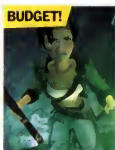
FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%
Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



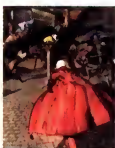
PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



DEVIL MAY CRY 4

PCZ Issue 197 - 82%
Best played on a pad - but comfortable on the keyboard - this is long hours of insane hack 'n' slash action and doolally cutscenes. Expect huge boss fights and an exhilarating slog through crowds of demons.

MMOS

MUST BUY!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

PCZ Issue: 200 - 92%
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvP'er will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SIMULATION

BUDGET!



X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



FREELANCER

PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X3* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC

PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%
If you fancy a life beneath the waves, this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

DRIVING/RACING

MUST BUY!



GTR2

PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX

PCZ Issue: 205 - 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Graham Nortons.



RACE DRIVER: GRID

PCZ Issue: 195 - 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



COLIN MCRÆ: DIRT

PCZ Issue: 183 - 88%
This time the rallying legend treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC. Time to get down and dirty with a 4x4.



GT LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends*, a successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging '60s never ended. (Well, fish-tailing '60s).

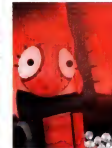
ODDBALL

MUST BUY!



SPORE

PCZ Issue: 199 - 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO

PCZ Issue: 201 - 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



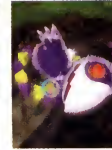
PORTAL

PCZ Issue: 187 - 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
The God game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



VIVA PIÑATA

PCZ Issue: 190 - 85%
Madder than a mercury-blooded clown, and as smart as Stephen Fry, *Viva Piñata* looks simple but is a ridiculously addictive animal-raising sandbox game. Don't be put off by the kiddy-looking graphics - it's a keeper.

SPORT

MUST BUY!



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

PCZ Issue: 202 - 90%
Another season passes and another *Football Manager* appears. New additions to this addictive football sim are a 3D match engine and options to deal with PRs and the media.

NEW ENTRY!



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009

PCZ Issue: 201 - 85%
PES lacks official support from the football business fraternity, but that doesn't detract from the game. This year's *PES* provides fun and realistic football, on and offline.



NBA 2K9

PCZ Issue: 203 - 87%
Basketball will never be as popular as football in the sports games stakes, but *NBA 2K9* deserves to be played. This is a superb recreation of America's second-favourite sport that won't disappoint on any front.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

PCZ Issue: 205 - 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



FIFA 08

PCZ Issue: 188 - 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.

ROLE-PLAYING

MUST BUY!



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.

NEW ENTRY!



FALLOUT 3

PCZ Issue: 201 - 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



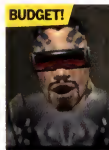
MASS EFFECT

PCZ Issue: 195 - 92%
BioWare's best game since *Knights of the Old Republic*, with a real-time combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and sex with aliens - it's a modern must.



THE WITCHER

PCZ Issue: 188 - 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With an epic story that pushes you into moral dilemmas, this RPG came out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



DEUS EX

PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs - if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

APRIL

DEMIGOD
THE GODFATHER II

ATARI
EA

MAY

ARMED ASSAULT II
FUEL
VIRTUA TENNIS 2009

505 GAMES
CODEMASTERS
SEGA

SUMMER

CHAMPIONS ONLINE
GHOSTBUSTERS
GOTHIC 3: GOLD EDITION
THE GUILD 2: PLATINUM EDITION
HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF BLOOD PRINCE
HEROES OVER EUROPE
OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2: DRAGON RISING
OVERLORD II
RED FACTION: GUERRILLA
SAM & MAX: SEASON 2
THE SIMS 3
TERMINATOR SALVATION
WATCHMEN: THE END IS NIGH

ATARI
ATARI
JOWOOD
JOWOOD
EA
ATARI
CODEMASTERS
CODEMASTERS
THQ
ATARI
EA
WARNER BROS
WARNER BROS

AUTUMN

COLIN MCRÆ: DIRT 2
THE ORB AND THE ORACLE

CODEMASTERS
JOWOOD

WINTER

PLANET 51
VANCOUVER 2010

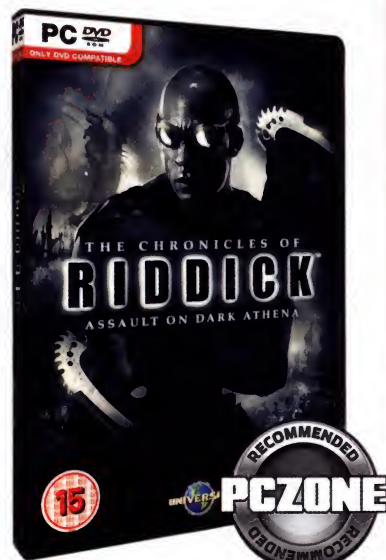
SEGA
SEGA

COMPETITION

**PRIZES
WORTH
£1,000**

Win!

**AN INFINITY LAN PARTY CYBERPOWER PC
AND THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA**



**PCZONE
87**

"The *Riddick* series probably has the most brutal fighting in any game we've ever seen"
David Brown, PCZ 207

INFINITY LAN PARTY CYBERPOWER*

NZXT Rogue crafted series
Intel E8500 CPU
20x DVD-RW optical drive
Radeon ATI HD4850 512MB
Microsoft Vista Home Premium 64-bit
2GB (2048MB) DDR2 PC6400
DFI LAN Party JR P45-T2RS IP45 mobo
630W power supply unit
750GB SATA II HDD

* Specification may change

SIZE DOESN'T MATTER, or so they say. And when it comes to the LAN Party CyberPower PC it really doesn't. This little fella boasts CrossFire-capable motherboard, a 750GB hard drive, 4GB of low-latency memory, and a water-cooled overclocked CPU stuffed into a chassis that's less than 50cm in every direction. It all looks good too, and at £1,000 it's a brilliant pick for a gaming PC.

And to celebrate the launch of Atari's *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena* (which is damn good as you will see in our full review on page 62) we're giving away one of these bad boys with a copy of the game.

We also have copies of *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena* to give to four runners-up.

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

**Q WHO DIRECTED THE 2004 MOVIE
THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK?**

- A. STEVEN SPIELBERG**
- B. DAVID TWOHY**
- C. ROB COHEN**

HOW TO ENTER

TEXT YOUR ANSWER TO 87474

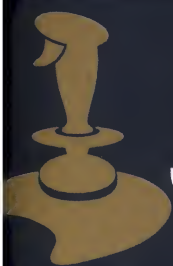
Start your message pczriddick, then a space, then enter A, B or C, then a space, then your name and email address.

TO ENTER ONLINE HEAD TO

www.futurecomps.co.uk/pczriddick and follow the prompts.

By sending your entry you agree to these competition rules and you confirm you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and carefully selected third parties. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the words NO INFO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at £1 plus your standard network tariff rate. Competition ends 31 May 2009, entries received after this date will not count, although you may still be charged. Standard competition and texting rules apply (see below).

TERMS & CONDITIONS By taking part in a competition, you agree to be bound by the competition rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futurecomps.co.uk. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the competition rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.



27th ANNUAL
**GOLDEN
JOYSTICK
AWARDS**



Let the voting commence

Long-list voting for the world's premier games awards opens on 1st May 2009

The Golden Joystick Awards are known globally as **'The People's Gaming Awards'** and they're the industry's most prestigious. Why? Because they're voted for by the people who matter most – you.

Whether you're a PC, PlayStation, Nintendo or Xbox fan, this is your opportunity to make sure your favourite game claims the ultimate gaming accolade, a Golden Joystick Award.

Go to www.goldenjoystick.com to pre-register and from 1st May, you can vote. But hurry! You've only got three weeks!...

PC GAMING IS CHANGING. SO ARE WE.

The new-look PC Gamer is packed
with unique features, reviews, insight and advice:
bringing you the best in PC gaming every month.

PC GAMER®

07.05.09

The voice of PC gaming



PCZONE

Hardware

Better gaming through technology

THEATRICAL XP

WOULD YOU BELIEVE it? It's only taken me two weeks, three versions of *Windows*, and more swear words than a Billy Connolly DVD box set, but I now have a working media center PC and am able to schedule recordings that actually record.

First I chose the ASUS P5N7A-VM and the Antec Veris Micro Fusion Remote. Both were a mistake. While the board is superb, the ASUS site is notoriously slow. It took me two days to download the chipset's drivers, and I could only find the ACPI link using Google.

As for the case, razor sharp edging betrayed an overall poor level of quality, and having to dismantle the front panel to install a hard drive made my jaw floppy with disbelief. The LCD and remote were useless (the display is too bright, impossible to dim, hard to read from across a room, and no good at receiving infrared signals) which means I shall not be buying Antec gear again.

After spending too long assembling the PC, I installed *Vista Ultimate* and immediately wished I hadn't. It just doesn't work, and is a pain to navigate should you achieve the miracle of amassing more than 101 recordings. *Windows 7's* beta was just as bad, having a bug which breaks dual-tuner support.

So I'm back with *XP*. It's faster than *Vista* or *7* and gets the job done. The world's most popular operating system is successful for a reason.

Handy

Phil Wand,
Hardware editor

BROADCAST BROADBAND

BT given the nod to create a superfast network

NOT LONG AGO we were slaves to the 56K modem: our pings reached three digits and patches took 24 hours to download.

In 2000 studies suggested that by 2008, a third of British households would be plugged in to a broadband line. As it turned out the country had more high-speed, always-on connections than any other country in Europe by 2006, and today more than half of us have fast cable or DSL.

Over the next three years, BT will spend £1.5 billion rolling out the next generation of broadband, replacing old copper cables with new optical fibres capable of carrying data at up to 100 megabits per second. The company hope to provide connections to 10 million homes by 2012, with the first customers going live this time next year.



Will BT measure up to Virgin Media's 50MB service?

While the government backs BT's new high-speed network, it's ludicrous that a good slice of the country is still stuck at 1Mbps or slower with almost all of us having our broadband usage

subjected to strict usage policies. There seems little point in having 100Mbps on tap when your connection is throttled back to just 100Kbps.
bt.com

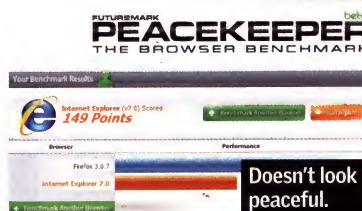
BROWSER WARS

Futuremark claim to keep the peace

Tired of measuring how fast your video card goes? *Peacekeeper* allows you to benchmark the speed of your browser instead.

Created by the Finnish team responsible for *3DMark*, the free online test takes less than five minutes to complete, and allows you to compare every browser on your PC, before comparing how your system rates alongside those of strangers.

This is all rather pointless, given that there is very little users can do to improve results other than buy a faster processor. And that's where Futuremark's



intentions become obvious – once the test is finished, links take you to direct to partner shopping sites where you are encouraged to exercise your credit card.
futuremark.com/peacekeeper

NEWS ROUND-UP

THIS SUMMER LOOKS to be the tipping point for solid-state drives. Toshiba, the second-largest flash memory maker, has promised to ramp up SSD production by 1,500%. The company says that lower retail prices combined with greater performance and reliability will make the drives seem a better choice than mechanical HDDs.
[WEBSITE toshiba.com](http://toshiba.com)

THE US DEPT of Justice has been pursuing companies involved in a price fixing conspiracy involving LCD screens. LG, Hitachi and others have so far been fined more than \$500million, the second-largest sum in antitrust history, with a number of executives facing jail.
[WEBSITE usdoj.gov](http://usdoj.gov)

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS
BY STEVE HOGARTY

FUTUREMARK: A being known to have travelled back in time to 2009 and 2003 in a failed attempt to warn his past self against appearing in *The Happening* and the *Max Payne* movie. **MEGABITS:** An attempt to remarket Hundreds and Thousands as a breakfast cereal, Megabits is responsible for a sharp rise in type-2 diabetes among children. **DESKSTAR:** The last stand of an ageing Darth Vader, the Deskstar is a desk-sized space station constructed from bits of old IKEA furniture found lying about the place. **ECOGREEN:** Samsung's cynical ploy to rebrand their slow hard-drives as environmentally friendly by using as many green buzzwords as possible.



PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those setbacks (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information about your problem as you can and system specs where applicable.

Dear Wandy

If it ain't working, don't panic – Wandy's here...

Q BITWISE

I'll be looking to buy my new PC in the coming months and it seems logical to go for an i7 system. To this end I have been looking at i7 systems on the market – the Chillblast Vulcan looks spot on. I've noticed most seem to have 6GB memory and 64-bit *Vista* – which conventional logic would suggest makes sense if you want to be able to use all that RAM.

Problem is I've always avoided 64-bit due to driver compatibility issues. Some of my favourite games have taken an age to optimise and I really want to avoid a big headache getting them to run in 64-bit. Seems that i7 is more or less forcing us down the 64-bit road anyway.

I'd really appreciate hearing your thoughts on the subject.

Is 64-bit *Vista* a more sensible gaming option now? Does i7 demand so much RAM? Would an i7 system coupled with a more prudent

32-bit *Vista* be a waste of power?

I don't want to find myself regretting my next PC purchase so any pointers would be greatly appreciated.

Chris Gaskell

A Rather than have me reassure you, make a list of every component used in whatever system you're looking to buy and then visit the website of each manufacturer to see the availability of drivers. You'll find that 64-bit versions are readily obtainable, and are as reliable as 32-bit equivalents.

While it's true that 32-bit software has to be rewritten to take account of all the new ways 64-bit systems handle numbers, and particularly to avoid the code bumping into protected areas of the system (something any 64-bit version of Windows expressly prohibits) these are but tiny issues compared to the complexity of the driver itself. What I'm trying to say is: if the 32-bit download works a treat, it's unlikely that the 64-bit alternative won't perform in exactly the same fashion, and particularly if the same people developed both versions.

Right now it makes no odds for



The Cray-1 and its creator Robin Williams. Sorry, Seymour Cray.

Photo courtesy of the Charles Babbage Institute, University of Minnesota.



Match the part number on your Radeon with the part number on Sapphire's website.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 9.2	20 Feb 09
NVIDIA	ForceWare 182.06	18 Feb 09

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08

gaming. If you were to sit at two PCs playing *Team Fortress 2*, one running 32-bit *Vista* and the other running 64-bit, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference. The way 64-bit encompasses tomorrow's larger numbers – principally, the ability to address larger amounts of memory – is what makes it a better long-term bet.

Personally, I'd wait for Windows 7 and not meddle with anything else. My tests have so far confirmed my suspicions that it is everything *Vista* should have been, but wasn't.

Q RADEON GEM

Just thought I'd drop a quick tip for anyone experiencing problems with Sapphire's Radeon HD 4870 512MB card. I bought this as an upgrade to my existing system and decided I'd also buy

Mass Effect, now that I had a system worthy of making it look pretty.

Straight away I started experiencing crashes with grey squares on the screen all over the place – on the desktop, everything else was fine.

After many emails to EA's tech support department I discovered that the BIOS version Sapphire shipped with the card had a bug that caused crashes when the card's clock speed changed, which happens in some 3D games.

After downloading and flashing the Radeon HD's BIOS, all was well. I've been 'crash free' for days now.

Chris Spacagna

A For those of you wondering how you'd go about flashing your Radeon's BIOS, you first need to visit the

"If your motherboard has an AGP interface, you're going to be pushed to find a significantly faster card"

"My tests have so far confirmed that Windows 7 is everything Vista should have been, but wasn't"

card manufacturer's website and visit their Support or Downloads section. Check that the card you have is the one for which they have an update and download the file to a new folder on the root of your system drive, such as C:\FLASH. If the update is in an archive such as a RAR or ZIP, extract it here before proceeding.

The next stage is to visit bootdisk.com, follow the DOS 6.22 link and format a floppy disk that'll boot your PC into a much earlier operating system rather than Windows. Leaving the same disk in the drive, restart and if prompted make sure you boot from it.

Once the DOS prompt appears, change directory to the folder you created earlier by typing CD C:\FLASH. Run the flash application or batch file by typing its name at the prompt. In the case of the Sapphire, this is flash.bat. Boot back into Windows and it's done.

Q POCKET ROCKET

I'm Deepan from India and a huge fan of PC ZONE. I don't think it's officially available in India so must read it at the British Council. I have a doubt regarding my laptop: I want to upgrade my graphics card to a much better one. I have a Dell XPS M1530 and would like a GeForce 9800 GTX 512MB.

The existing GeForce 8600 GT card is not integrated with the motherboard, so it appears that it can be removed. I want to know if the GTX is something I can use in my laptop, and that it's fine for the motherboard.

Deepan

A This is actually a whole lot more complicated than it seems. You need to be careful when selecting replacement parts for your laptop as they're not as interchangeable as their desktop counterparts. This is not just for technical reasons but also because laptop chassis are built to withstand a fixed level of heat being

generated inside them, and the moment you change the factory standard hardware for the equivalent of a steam boiler you'll run into all manner of stability problems – not to mention invalidating your warranty.

Believe it or not, the best plan when looking to change laptop hardware is to look on eBay for it. There are a good number of sellers stocking genuine Dell parts that aren't readily available to the public elsewhere, and you can confirm with the seller whether what you're buying is certified to match your system.

All that said, I'm not certain the M1530 is any different to mainstream laptops and thus can't be upgraded beyond what you have already. You can certainly buy a bigger dual graphics monster for the M1730 (Dell part number RW331) but I've never seen anything for its smaller brother, sorry!

Q PC SWANSONG

My last computer purchase was in mid-2005 and I'm finding my PC is now struggling to keep up with today's games. I've never upgraded a PC on my own and I'm thinking of giving it a go. I'll eventually buy a new higher spec machine when I can afford to, however, at the moment I'm on a budget. I was wondering if you could give me some guidance?

At present I have an AMD Athlon 64 (3400+), 1GB DDR, 250GB HDD and NVIDIA GeForce 6200. I'm looking to spend between £100 and £200 and



As seen on eBay, a laptop card for the Dell XPS M1730.



Sony's BDU-X10S, costs less than £50 and works a treat.

13 BLU-RAY

Now that the dust has settled from the fight between HD DVD and Blu-ray, the two competing high-definition DVD formats, it's time learn how the winner works.

The amount of information a laser can read from the surface of an optical disk such as a CD or DVD is restricted by its wavelength – essentially, the lower the frequency of the light, the less data it can deal with. The invention of a higher-frequency blue laser has allowed the storage of larger amounts of data on Blu-ray discs, or BDs.

For the film world, this allows high-definition movies to be stored on the media, and for the computer world it means you can store over 10 times the amount of information you could squeeze onto a DVD. Typically, this is 25GB for single layer BD-Rs (the Blu-ray Disc Recordable format) and 50GB for dual layer. There's even talk of quad layer 100GB discs that will work in standard Blu-ray players.

When buying a Blu-ray player, you should look for a BD-R/RE device that is backward compatibility with CDs and DVDs.

want to make the most of the upgrade. Could you give me some options?

John MacSwan

A Money would be best spent replacing your old GeForce graphics card.

Your processor is a technological cul-de-sac, as is the memory you have – any money spent here will be wasted as you'll neither tell the difference nor will you be able to reuse it in the future. With a new video card you'll be able to yank it out and take it with you when you change PC.

The only problem is without knowing what your motherboard and power

supply unit are I can't say whether getting a new card will actually worth the effort. When you bought your machine in 2005, most PCs had an AGP interface for video cards – this is entirely unlike the later PCI-Express slots used in today's hardware.

If your motherboard has an AGP interface, you're going to be hard-pushed to find a significantly faster card, and you won't be able to reuse it when you purchase a PC at a later date.

If you have £200, a free x16 PCI-Express slot, and suitable power supply available, the answer's been simple for some months now: buy a Radeon HD 4870 512MB. **PCZ**

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(kovin) Anyone know if Windows 7 will come in 32 and 64-bit flavours? Or will it just advance to being 64-bit as standard for all programs? (Rich) I'm using the 32-bit version on my machines, so I suspect the final release will be available as both 32-bit and 64-bit. (Clansman) What's the latest on the release date? Still end of year 2009? I hope Windows 7 is better for gaming this time round, and the 64-bit is actually made use of. (Rich) The beta expires August 1st 2009. (Heero Yuy) They've pretty much said that once the beta expires, they'll release a release candidate – no beta 2 is planned – for final bug squashing before releasing it to the masses.

HOW WE TESTED

Read speeds: Fast finding and transfer of data is vital. **Price:** We took into account each drive's gig per quid ratio. **Power usage:** Low power drives are good, but you won't save much cash on your electricity bill using a slower drive. **Durability:** Drives shouldn't develop errors soon after formatting or lose data in regular use.

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.11

PRICE £99 **MANUFACTURER** Seagate **WEBSITE** seagate.com

UNTIL RECENTLY hard disk drives were reaching their limit. If the clusters of metal that store data on hard disk drives got any smaller, they'd have become superparamagnetic. In (almost)

plain English this means the metal ran the risk of flipping polarity when it reached a certain temperature. If this happened to your HDD due to it overheating, it would mean the irrevocable loss of gigabytes of data.

This meant pushing HDD storage beyond the terabyte barrier involved changing the materials used in the device's storage palettes and developing perpendicular recording. This allowed data bits to stand one one end, rather than lie flat (imagine standing CD cases on end on your shelves, compared to leaving them flat).

SPECIFICATION

PRICE PER GIGABYTE	7p
READ SPEED (AVERAGE)	36.1MB/s
READ SPEED (BURST)	208MB/s
ACCESS TIME	16.1ms
CACHE	32MB
CONNECTION	SATA



As ever, the R&D needed to do this was expensive, so the first terabyte drives were pricey. So much so that you could buy a set of RAID HDDs that'd give 2TB of storage for less than one terabyte drive.

Today, mass production means that TB-class HDDs have become affordable. And this Seagate is the proof, giving 1.5TB of space for under £100. But it's not 1.5TB. Seagate's marketing people think a gigabyte is 1,000 million bytes,

when it's actually 1,074 million. Maths errors aside, this drive still delivers 1.397TB of storage – around 7p/GB.

Added to this ridiculous value, the Seagate is quiet, and performs extremely well – topping our tests – thanks to a 32MB cache and high read speeds. Write speeds are a bit slower, but this Seagate is our top hard drive.

PCZONE
92

HITACHI DESKSTAR 7K1000

PRICE £89
MANUFACTURER Hitachi Global Storage Technologies
WEBSITE hitachigst.com

IF YOU'RE LOOKING for a reasonably priced drive, it's well worth spending an extra £20 to get the 7K1000's one terabyte variant.

Bigger drives simply offer more value, and while this 750GB HDD can't compete with the Barracuda (above) on value, it's still provides a lot of space for not much money.

Overall, this HDD's performance is excellent, with access times that are especially impressive.

PCZONE
84



SPECIFICATION

PRICE PER GIGABYTE	7.3p
READ SPEED (AVERAGE)	36.2MB/s
READ SPEED (BURST)	229.1MB/s
ACCESS TIME	16.1ms
CACHE	16MB
CONNECTION	SATA

SAMSUNG ECOGREEN HD502HI

PRICE £43
MANUFACTURER Samsung
WEBSITE snipurl.com/samsunghdd

WHAT USED TO be budget-class hard drives have morphed into saleable "eco-friendly" ranges. Samsung's 500GB EcoGreen HDD, for example, seems to conserve power by rotating at 5,400rpm, a tawdry pace usually reserved for laptop drives.

In practice clever caching tech means it's not that much slower than a regular drive, and it's cheap, although only average value per gigabyte. One to go for if you're strapped for cash.

PCZONE
82



SPECIFICATION

PRICE PER GIGABYTE	8.5p
READ SPEED (AVERAGE)	35MB/s
READ SPEED (BURST)	212.7MB/s
ACCESS TIME	17.6ms
CACHE	16MB
CONNECTION	SATA



KONE GAMING MOUSE

PRICE £50 MANUFACTURER Roccat WEBSITE roccat.org

IF YOU ARE big of paw and like a rodent that fills your grip – as opposed to one you flick around with fingertip control – then Roccat's Kone is the mouse for you.

The Kone's design is like an oversized Logitech G5, but with a 3200dpi laser it's closer technically to the odder-looking Sidewinder G9.

One particular strength of the Kone is the weights system – each increment is heavy enough to be meaningful, and swapping out different masses is simple. The downside of this rodent is its cost.

PCZONE
85



SCYTHE KAMA PANEL

PRICE £30 MANUFACTURER QuietPC WEBSITE quietpc.com

ANY SELF-BUILT PC feels a little unfinished without a built-in card reader, like this comprehensively decked out affair from Scythe.

The reason we like it is perhaps down to the fact that *PC ZONE*'s cameras still use CompactFlash as opposed to the tiny MicroSD cards, and the Kama Panel is one of the only ones

which still supports this old-school format. More likely, though, it's because it also supports SATA hard drives.

The Kama is remarkably flexible, and even has volume sockets for cans and a microphone on its tiny fascia.

PCZONE
90



MSI GT725

PRICE £1,125 MANUFACTURER MSI WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

THIS WHOPPING 17IN laptop packs a Centrino 2 P9500 processor and an HD4850 graphics card with 512MB of RAM. So while it's not the most powerful gaming machine on the planet, it does have enough poke to run *Crysis* at the screen's native resolution.

To top it off, the GT725 is also very light for its screen size – laptops like this

can be weighty – and it has an instant overclocking button.

The red plastic trim clashes a little with the classy brushed aluminium body, but it's not as garish as previous MSI machines.

PCZONE
91



PROLITE E2407

PRICE £175 MANUFACTURER Iiyama WEBSITE iiyama.co.uk

CHEAP CAN MEAN rubbish when it comes to monitors, but not in this 24in set's case. This TV-proportioned 16:9 screen isn't the best, but we can highly recommend it. The picture quality is a cut above most panels, having all the benefits speedy LCD technology brings without the colour tints. The unusual dimensions and high-def 1920x1080

resolution make it perfect for hooking up to a console as well. The biggest problems are the poor viewing angles and plasticky surround, but these are flaws we can overlook at this price.

PCZONE
97

Reviewed by Adam Oxford

REMEMBER:
IF YOU'RE SUBJECT
TO NERD RAGE,
WEAR GOGGLES

If you're the type of person who takes their feelings of anger and inadequacy out on your peripherals, wear safety goggles. Flying shards of plastic from shattered mice can cause serious damage to your eyes, and hamper your game playing.

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both pricey and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ZOTAC GEFORCE GTX 295

PRICE £436
zotac.com

The current king of the hill is this giant dual-GPU board from NVIDIA. That ridiculously large heatsink covers two 280 chips running side-by-side. And it's not just faster than AMD's 4870X2 (its nearest rival), but it's also a lot more energy efficient. Good news, as the 4870X2 is currently propping up the share prices of several major electricity companies.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 965

PRICE £839
intel.com



Intel's latest processing powerhouse doesn't just have four cores with which to throw your games around, it also support hyperthreading for running even more simultaneous processes without affecting framerates. The upshot: there's not a game in the world that this will struggle with.

SCREEN

NEC 24WMGX3

PRICE £529
onec.com



If we had the money we'd fritter it on this incredible 27in screen from NEC. Picture quality is simply unrivalled, and it's got so many input options it's the subject of at least three web fetish sites. Size queens will always go for something larger, and that would be lavishly decadent too.

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £321
asus.com

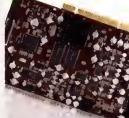


This Core i7-friendly board sports the X58 Intel chipset and everything else you can imagine. It's the deluxe department store of motherboard design, hawking bespoke capacitor design and expertly tuned performance pathways, to the sleazy suburban joys of three-way SLI.

SOUNDCARD

AUZENTECH X-FI PRELUDE 7.1

PRICE £144
auzentech.com



Take a top-of-the-range Creative X-Fi audio chip and surround it with components of such a high grade they're spoken of only in hushed tones by those in the know. Now, add Dolby Digital Live, you'd have a pretty cool sound card, right? Actually, you'd end up with this one.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.11

PRICE £99
seagate.com



If we're talking money no object, then we'd couple this with a solid-state drive from Samsung for maximum performance and storage, but if our loaded rig was limited to one hard disk, it would be this one. A huge 1.3TB of storage and a performance unmatched by any other vanilla HDD.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £195
logitech.co.uk



The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE HD4850

PRICE £120
sapphiretech.com

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £120 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down and buy one.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE 2 DUO E2180

PRICE £44
intel.com



At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200 processors from Intel. It's not surprising that things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD

ASROCK CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

PRICE £60
asrock.com



Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR 1600AAJS

PRICE £30
wdc.com



A 160GB hard drive, like this SATA 2 model, remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN

VIEWSONIC VA903M

PRICE £118
viewsoniceurope.com



The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers, although it can't handle native widescreen resolutions.

SOUNDCARD

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

PRICE £20
uk.europe.creative.com



The cheap Audigy card features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard, unless you're an audiophile, or you want your PC to act as a top-class music system.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-530

PRICE £55
logitech.co.uk



Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available just about everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And their value can't be beat, giving sound quality above their price bracket.

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PCZONE

Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

WHAT TO SAY?

S I'VE BEEN SWAMPED, I tellsya! Things were a bit thin on the ground last month in relation to the world of free gaming news, but this month we have been positively inundated with stories. I was going to write a six-page editorial on why *Dirty Split*'s name was so delightfully sordid, but there's just been so much news coming out that my idea was shot down in flames.

Instead of that we have a look at the *Unreal Tournament 3* mega-update thing, the *Titan Pack*, plus our first proper forays into *Quake Live*. Which one comes out on top? You'll just have to read the bits to the right of this column to find out.

Ooh, it feels just like 1999 again, what with all this *Unreal vs Quake* talk. Personally, I've always enjoyed both of them, but it has been a long time since I gave up playing competitive multiplayer shooters online. I prefer something a bit more cooperative nowadays, something where you aren't wiped out constantly by hyperactive teenagers. However, maybe re-igniting these franchises will propel deathmatch gaming back into the spotlight.

We've also got the unexpected news that GSC Gameworld have decided to release the first *STALKER* game, *Shadow of Chernobyl*, for free to everyone. The catch? Well, you'll have to cast your eyes to the right to see what that is, but suffice it to say that, with all these news chunklets to devour, plus the usual mods and freeware, this is a great Freeplay.

Even if it doesn't have my *Dirty Split* article in it.

David Brown
Staff writer



UT3 TITAN PACK

The struggling shooter gets a giant update

WEBSITE unrealtournament3.com

LET'S SAY YOU bought *Unreal Tournament 3* today, and that you'd never dipped into its tasty gaming waters before, or perhaps your last visit was either the original *UT* or its 2003/2004 incarnations. Given that as the case, and you'd just bought *UT3*, you'd barely be aware of the huge amount of new stuff that the *Titan Pack* includes.

You might say this was the case with every patch or DLC if you'd never played the game before, but the *Titan Pack* doesn't give any indication as to what is new or improved. There are no big "NEW!" labels to make sure you know what has been added. Unless I somehow managed to turn them off.

The *Titan Pack* is targeting new and existing players with a substantial array of new maps, modes, mutators and multiplayer mayhem. All this new stuff should get returning players excited, but there isn't anything that'd make a disillusioned player change his mind on the game. The *Titan* mutator is fun, but it isn't as impressive as one would have thought it would be. Yes, you are bigger (especially if you expand to your greatest size) but because you still look the same, it's a wasted opportunity.

If you could morph into some huge beast instead of just a giant version of yourself, then perhaps that would have made it more fun. As it is, perhaps the most exciting addition is CTF_Face, that

classic map from the annals of *Unreal Tournament*'s history. Watch out for those snipers and redeemer-wielders popping up in the towers!

There are also two new game modes: Greed and Betrayal. At the time of writing, these haven't worn out their novelty value. Having said that, credit should be given to Epic for introducing them. It would have been oh-so-easy to just pump out a couple of terrible new maps and some boring mutators, but they've genuinely attempted to produce something important and refreshing for *UT* players.

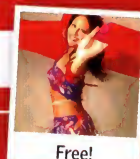
The *Titan Pack* isn't perfect, but it's free, so there's no reason you shouldn't try it out.

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



547
HOURS*

IT'S ALIVE! ALIVE!

Lunchtime becomes fighttime with *Quake Live*

WEBSITE quakelive.com

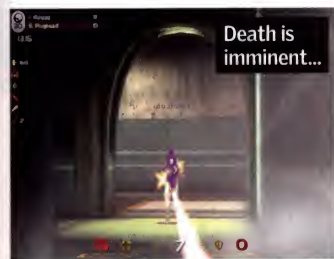
THE BROWSER-BASED iteration of the classic id deathmatch festival is here. The wizards in Dallas have managed to cram *Quake III* into your browser's window and, amazingly, it doesn't seem to have suffered at all.

Quake Live's gameplay is the same as the original game, with the addition of a few little features. Even if you haven't played it for years, it's amazing how it all just comes flooding back.

The login/registration procedure is relatively painless and once you're in there, you get invited to take on an obstacle course to determine how good you are. This helps determine what skill band the game's matchmaking tool will recommend to you. You can, of course, ignore this and just find your own server, but the game is always more fun when you think you have a chance of winning.

There are a couple of little issues: even with a good ping, your connection can drop. In a game that relies so much on instant reactions and lightning-quick movement, any break in the flow usually means instant death.

There's also the chance the game's matchmaking system will be hideously abused by people who decide to play on newbie servers for a laugh, or people who decidedly underplay their abilities in the initial training match so they get assigned to a skill band they will be able to easily dominate.

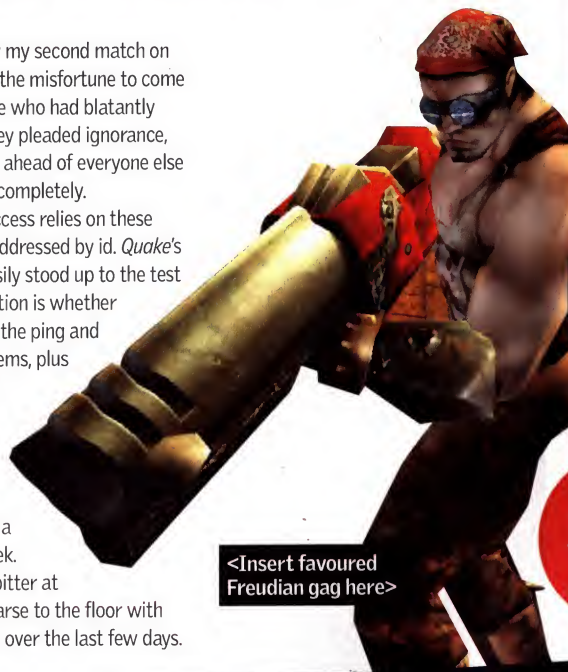


"Quake's gameplay has easily stood up to the test of time"

In fact, in only my second match on *Quake Live* I had the misfortune to come across two people who had blatantly done just this. They pleaded ignorance, but being 40 kills ahead of everyone else ruined the game completely.

Continued success relies on these problems being addressed by id. *Quake's* gameplay has easily stood up to the test of time. The question is whether they can iron out the ping and connection problems, plus tightening up the matchmaking to make it fun for those of us without the reaction times of a teenage cybergeek.

Not that I'm bitter at them nailing my arse to the floor with a railgun so often over the last few days.



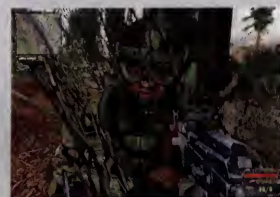
<Insert favoured Freudian gag here>

SNIPPETS



BLACK SHEEP

WEBSITE commandandconquer.com
Way back when *Command & Conquer: Generals* was released, Black Sheep – a mission involving the Global Liberation Army irradiating a US-controlled town – was torn from the game, for reasons of taste. Now it's back. Hurrah!



ALPHA STALKER

WEBSITE gsc-game.com
A lot of us aren't privy to the workings of the game development process and we often wonder about what doesn't make it into our favourite games. Wonder no longer as far as *STALKER* is concerned, as GSC have released build of the game from 2004 for free!

Bug Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH
THE GUILD 2:
VENICE
V3.5 - EN

"Fixed: Arrange an Arrest and torture in prison works now perfectly."

MOVIE OF THE MONTH

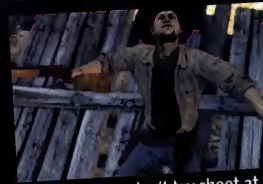
CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD
We're all geared up for the summer release of *Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood*, so excited that we can barely keep our grizzled, macho image intact as new images and videos materialise. The current announce trailer looks cool as Lee Van Cleef.



1 The McCall brothers wander the West in their hunt for gold.



2 They decide to raid a gold mine, so kill the workers.



3 Best if you don't try shoot at a gunslinger. You end up dead.



4 Ray, the game's protagonist, is nonchalant about murder.



Demos



Take a tour of your free DVD with *Adam Glick*

TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.

Strap on those shades and take to the skies!

WEBSITE hawxgame.uk.ubi.com

ONE OF THE things that is wrong with *HAWX* is that it doesn't have a beach volleyball mini-game where you wear too-tight pink shorts and enjoy an entirely too homoerotic experience while wearing wrap-around shades. You know, like in *Top Gun*, the movie that so clearly inspired *HAWX*'s makers. So, while you can't strip down to your underoos and oil yourself up, *HAWX* does give you the heady thrills of air-to-air combat, albeit without Kelly McGillis.

Sadly, you don't get to give yourself a comedy callsign either. How much better would it have been if you could call yourself Fuckbag or Scrotum? Wouldn't it be amazing to have your wingmen screaming the word "Scrotum!" at the top of their lungs when you downed an enemy plane? Ubisoft, make it so in some DLC, please.

But, if you can't get the license to *Top Gun*, make sure you get Lou Gossett Jr. from *Iron Eagle* involved instead. It needs to be done.



PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The PC ZONE discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.



MAVERICK

Remember *Ace Combat*? You might have played it on consoles at some point. *HAWX* reminds us very much of that arcade fly-'em-up. It just looks much prettier.



ICEMAN

This is the Enhanced Reality System (ERS) – it tells you how to shoot planes down. And if it isn't a blatant homage to *X-Wing* or *TIE Fighter* we don't know what is.

TOP GUNS AND IRON EAGLES



VIPER

One thing that can't be denied is how luscious the ground looks. Until you get too close to it, when you realise they've got the scale completely out of all proportion.



GOOSE

You don't just fly about in the day either. There's a whole world to explore at night. It's the same as the world you'll explore by day, but everything seems cosier at night.

GRAND AGES: ROME

We came, we saw, we built

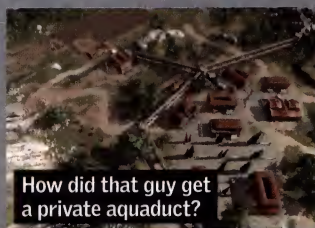
WEBSITE grandages.com

THE ODD THING about this game, given it's about building the Roman civilisation – an empire famed for its road building – is that it doesn't give you the option to build your own roads. If you're going to defy conventions, that's one way to do it.



I wept as I saw how much I had to conquer.

The rest of the game is similar to the *Caesar* series and *Grand Age's* predecessor, *Imperium Romanum*. If you liked those games, have a gander at this one. And don't forget to build baths or there won't be any nice ruins to name British cities after.



How did that guy get a private aquaduct?

IMPERIALIST SWINE



EPIC

It looks so nice from up here. It'd be a shame if we were to meddle and wreck it all...



DECREPIT

...arses. Ah well, *Time Team* will be able to piece it together in 2,000 years time.

MEN AT WAR

Company of Heroes' mentor

WEBSITE menofwargame.com

WHAT DO I mean by that? Well, the *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II* series introduced the cover thing into RTS. If it didn't, I must have missed the game that did.

Men of War is the third in the series, and this demo puts you into the game's

smaller battles – though some of the larger ones are epic in scope, and you'll be gnawing your nails to the quick by the end of them.

This demo has some strange missions, but it still gives you a good idea of how *Men at War* works.



1. INVENTORY

As before, you can carry a finite amount of stuff, including funky new hats and strange grenades.

2. INTERFACE

Anyone used to *Soldiers* will be familiar with *Men of War's* control scheme.

3. LANDSCAPE

While it won't destroy your system, *Men of War* still looks pretty good.

THEY WERE SOLDIERS



THE CHAPS

Alexey Kuznetsov and Victor Smirnov are the two chaps you control in the demo (and the Russian campaign in the game).



EXPENDABLE YOUTH

These guys will all have names too, but they are just pawns in your grand strategy game.

BEST OF THE REST



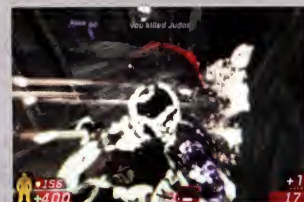
Here are the some of the other demos and movies that you can enjoy on this month's cover DVD. Or not, if that's your will...



CODENAME: PANZERS - COLD WAR

The new *Codename: Panzers* game will provide all the tank-based bluster a fan of the iron horses might want.

www.panzers.de



UT3 TITAN PACK

The *Titan Pack* (see page 94) aims to bring *UT3* back to the forefront of PC deathmatching.

unrealtournament3.com/uk



DYSON

You might remember *Dyson* from issue 203, where it was our lead Freeware game. Explore the universe and implant planets with your seeds. Lo-fi fun.

www.dyson-game.com



DIRTY SPLIT

The game with the rudest name ever shows that, with a bit of wit and determination, point-and-clicks can be as fun to play as they used to be.

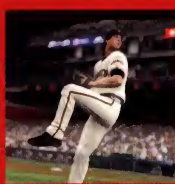
dreamagination.org

HOT DOWNLOADS
PCZONE

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K9

I hate baseball, but I know there are a growing number of people in the UK who like it. So, if their NBA 2K9 game is anything to go by, baseball fans should be all over this demo.

snipurl.com/2k9demo



ART OF MURDER: HUNT FOR THE PUPPETEER

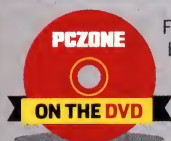
Want a demo of the sequel to a dull adventure from City Interactive? You got it! This time, there are some murders and our heroine has to bring the killer to justice... just like in the first one.

snipurl.com/puppeteer



Freeware

A skint *David Brown* scavenges for free games



Freeware is so good at bringing you free games, so utterly fantastic at doing that which its namesake describes, that other publications' freeware sections are ashamed to even be sold in the same newsagents. This month, interrogate mini-skirted and beehived women, fly around without the use of a broomstick, help a squid steal eggs belonging to other aquatic life, stick missile launchers on dinosaurs, and defend an eskimo against charging snow.



HEY WIZARD

DEVELOPER Armor Games
WEBSITE spelgrim.com/play/hey-wizard

WHILE THE WIZARD in this game is bouncing around all over the place, he isn't actually jumping. This is a platform game in which you can't jump; a rather bizarre variant on the genre. Instead, you have to use your magical abilities to propel yourself into the air, either by blasting the ground with a lightning bolt to throw you upwards, or by using your flamethrower-esque power as a pseudo-jet pack. For a web-based game, this is surprisingly deep, gameplay-wise. Hey Wizard isn't over in two seconds and you haven't seen all there is to see in that same period of time. Instead, you will be still learning the ropes a while after you start playing. Indeed, I can't say I've completely got the hang of the third power – the withered Zombie Hand which sprouts from any surface you fire it at. Hey Wizard isn't without its faults (movement in the air is very fiddly) but there's some solid gameplay to be found here if you happen to be better at it than me, which won't be hard. To be honest, I struggled to master even the simplest of jumps.



DIRTY SPLIT

Filthy title, clean fun

DEVELOPER Dreamagination WEBSITE dreamagination.org

THOSE OF YOU out there who are aficionados of free games will have likely seen this before, but seeing as we hadn't managed to cover it up to this point, and with me being a big old adventure fan and all, I thought I'd make sure there wasn't anyone out there who'd missed it. The game is *Dirty Split*, and it probably has the filthiest title you've ever heard in your life. The funny thing is, I can't for the life of me understand what the title has to do with the game itself.

A traditional adventure in every sense, *Dirty Split* is set in the swinging '60s, with you playing *Dragnet*-style (that's the movie *Dragnet*, made when Tom Hanks was a good actor) gumshoe Al Baxter. Baxter has been called in to investigate the murder of a socialite's ex-fiance. The man was behaving strangely in the past few weeks and had

only just called off the engagement, without any explanation as to why he had chosen to do so. Enraged, the socialite's brother had threatened him, the dunderheaded cops taking this to be ironclad evidence of his guilt and summarily chucking him in the local nick. This is where you come in, interviewing the family, the accused, and the cops.

Soon it becomes clear this crime is convoluted, and you're jetting off across America in search of the real killer. You do this using an extremely easy-to-use interface – right-click brings up the actions you can perform, and applying stupid actions to inappropriate objects leads to the customary witty rejoinder from your character.

The sheen of classic LucasArts games is all over *Dirty Split*, right down to the "I'm selling these fine leather jackets," and "Look! A three-headed monkey!" lines dotted liberally about the place. Puzzles are a little offbeat but aren't outrageous. A little bit of perseverance and the most difficult ones will be solved quickly. That said, there's easily a few genuine hours play here and the script is pretty tight.

The bane of most indie adventures is the voice acting, but Baxter is pleasant to listen to, although some of the female voices are iffy.

In the end this is as good as you are going to get from the indie adventure scene, so if you pass it up, you'll be spitting in the developer's face.

"The sheen of classic LucasArts games is all over *Dirty Split*"

BLUSH

Underwater egg-chasing

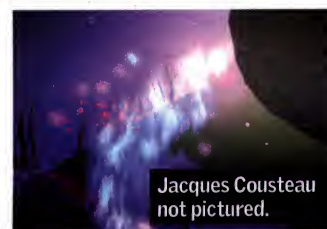
DEVELOPER Flashbang Studios WEBSITE blurst.com/blush/play

AS TIME-WASTING games go, *Blush* has a simple-yet-addictive premise: collect eggs, take them to a special collection orb and repeat. Simplistic, yet with a charm that encourages play, this is one of those games you'll find yourself playing again and again in order to move up that high score table.

You control a squid whose tentacles attract eggs that float about in the

murky depths of the sea. Manoeuvre yourself using the mouse to get the eggs onto your tentacles and then take them back to a collection orb, where you receive points and a tentacle growth spurt. More eggs can be found by whipping other floating creatures with your tentacles, who then explode and release far more than you'll find by merely wandering the ocean.

You have four minutes to collect as many eggs as possible and, as usual, some people have spent so much time playing it that you've got virtually no chance of getting anywhere near the top. You do get achievements to aim for, which gives you one more reason to go back to the game, other than attempting to break your high score.



DINOWAURS

Dino deathmatch

DEVELOPER Intuition Games WEBSITE kongregate.com/games/intuition/dinowauers

USUALLY, WEB GAMES approach their subject matter in a basic way. You don't often get many that offer more than a "press A and D to move, Space to fire" set of instructions. *Dinowauers*, on the other hand, has a three-step tutorial to complete before you can get into the meat of the game. Essentially, you'll take control of one of four different dinosaurs, each with two weapons strapped to its back.

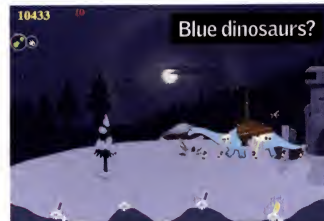
You waddle around the 2D landscape and use your weapons to destroy your

opponent's towns and, eventually, each other. Each player starts with a set number of towns under his control, from which he can buy better weapons and receive gold as time passes.

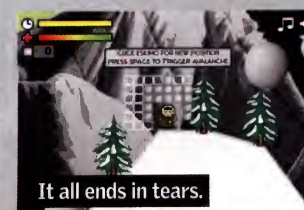
The higher up a town is located, the more gold it produces and the cheaper the weapons are to buy there. Of course, moving all the way back to your best town means your weaker ones will get captured very quickly, so there's a balance to be struck between defending from the front or luring the enemy into

your territory, then bashing his head in with your cheaply bought and yet superior weaponry.

Considering this is just a web game, the depth is remarkable. Which means some will argue that *Dinowauers* is too deep for a time-wasting lunch hour, but not enough to satisfy those who want a cerebral experience. Either way, it's still a decent game and, if you make sure not to expect a ridiculous amount from it, you should have fun, especially if you can get a friend to play too.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



AVALANCHER

DEVELOPER Sinister Sea WEBSITE sinistersea.com/avalancher

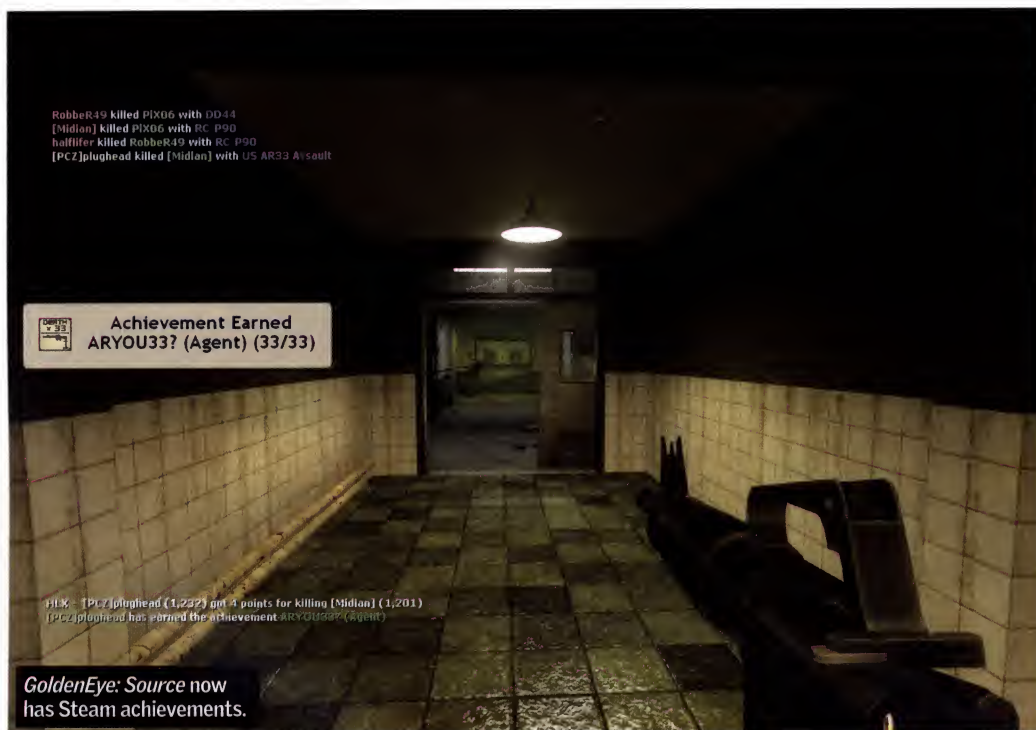
SNOW, ESKIMOS AND ruthless death-dealing, all forged together in one cute little webgame package. That's what we have here in *Avalancher*.

Charged with protecting an eskimo who's about to be crushed by snow, you have to position your man on a suitable area of the basic level map, and then build fortifications to protect him from the onrushing snow. You get a finite number of defences on each level, so you must choose your placements wisely.

There are 12 levels to puzzle over, each one progressively more difficult than the previous one. Some of the final levels are fiendish in their intricacies, but even then they aren't too difficult to get past. I mean, even I managed to finish it, so it really can't be that difficult.

Extend

David Brown shows the best mods, maps and add-ons



GOLDENEYE: SOURCE

The name is Freeman... Gordon Freeman

WEBSITE goldeneyesource.net MOD FOR Half-Life 2

A LOT OF you guys out there with your fingers on the mod scene's pulse will know about *GoldenEye: Source*. But you might be surprised to learn it's still going and is stronger than ever. Granted, server numbers are light, but what places there were to play it were usually nearly all full. There have been plenty of

changes in recent times to warrant you taking another look at this total conversion for *Half-Life 2*.

First of all, there are more maps than ever. All the official *GoldenEye* maps are included, plus a selection of new versions. If you shudder at the thought of having to play the updated versions of maps like Complex, you'll be happy to hear there are classic ones available instead.

As well as the maps, all the weapons are authentically recreated, with Scaramanga's Golden Gun present and rendered in glorious polygon blocks for extra authenticity. Game mods are faithful, with a lot of servers opting for the *Licence to Kill* one-shot mode. This, at

least from the games we've seen, hasn't been met with universal praise, with some lamenting the lack of servers dedicated to the vanilla game.

Character models are still being included, so some favourites from the N64 original are missing, but the biggest names are all available: Bond, Baron Samedi, Oddjob, Jaws, Valentin Zerkovsky (Robbie Coltrane's Russian gangster), May Day, and others are there to be slaughtered in battle, though thankfully using the mouse to aim has eliminated the annoying advantage Oddjob had in the N64 original. So there's no need for him to be banned for being too short this time out.

Other than a few niggles with crawlspaces and the like, this version is vastly superior to those released a few years ago. All credit has to go to the team who've persevered with the project, especially as one of their leading lights sadly passed away some time ago. A lot of teams would have given up, but they've soldiered on, dedicating recent progress made to him.

If you haven't played *GoldenEye: Source* since it initially appeared on the modding radar, do so now. It's changed a lot and, if judging by the form of the modders behind it, it'll continue to do so.

We've certainly enjoyed our time blasting each other on Facility and Caves, although this time we can't look at the other half of the screen to see what our opponent is doing. Ah well, guess we can't have everything.

"This version is vastly superior to those released a few years ago"



5.56MM FULL METAL JACKET

Sound off like you got a pair

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/556mm-full-metal-jacket MOD FOR *Doom III*

THE MULTIPLAYER SIDE of *Doom III* never took off. Some say because it was too restrictive numbers-wise, while others point to the engine being too demanding for the time. But a mod community has been beavering away behind the scenes, trying to make the game accessible to the non-fanboy.

And *5.56mm Full Metal Jacket* mod is at the front of that fight.

The development team say their mod has "absolute precise damage and ballistics calculations" to deliver more realistic gunplay, and they've broken out from the claustrophobic corridors of *Doom III* into open spaces.



Yet this mod suffers from the common problem that no-one is playing the thing. We went online on a number of different occasions and were only able to find a game once. Given how much effort has gone into this, it must be dispiriting. All we can do is wish them luck and that people will tune in more in the future.

Make the most of your health, this one is tough.



THE DELTA SECTOR

Chuck Norris is nowhere to be seen

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/the-delta-sector MOD FOR *Far Cry*

THIS MOD PLACES you in the shoes of a special forces soldier who has to kill a lot of people and explore some landscape. To be honest, the storyline is vague at best and it isn't why you'll be playing this mod. The main reason will be that it pushes *Far Cry*'s engine to its limits. They've done a great job too, though the game does look better in stills than it does during play.

There's a lot to *The Delta Sector* as well, and the game is more difficult than you might imagine. There's a little too much of the old "Bloody hell, the sodding AI can see me through the long grass!" issue cropping up, which can make things frustrating. But that's always been an issue in *Far Cry*, so you can't really expect them to have taken it out.

This is a good mod for a classic game. And if they can do this with the first CryEngine, imagine what they can do with *Crysis*.

VTMB COMPANION MOD

Bloodsucking is more fun with a partner

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/vtmb-companion-mod MOD FOR *Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines*

ONE OF THE greatest testaments to the gaming community's persistence (and sheer bloody-minded insanity) is that *Vampire: Bloodlines* is still being patched and modded so long after its incredibly buggy release. The game's potential was vast, it was just the execution that, to put it bluntly, was atrocious on its launch.

The unofficial patches are up to version 6.0 now (download from snipurl.com/vtmb6, or just get it off our DVD), but also available is this mod, which allows you to gather NPCs in the game under your command and form a party.

The mod also allows you to take control of your teammates remotely, making them take the punishment while you watch from afar. This is extremely

handy if you're playing one of the less-combat centric clans, like the Ventrue or Tremere.

As well as these control aspects, you can also position NPCs in various animated poses around your haven,

which is just an excuse for some players to get their perv on. Other useful additions are a second inventory, accessible through your companions, and the option to change your companions' clothes using installable outfit packs.



Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE's* forum, Fight Club and Zone Chat

The land of Twitter has engulfed us and we just can't get enough of Stephen Fry's meandering thoughts. Steve even got to play *Left 4 Dead* with Father Ted man, Graham Linehan, because of Twitter. Other than that, it has been all about *Quake Live* and the lag. There was also a hearty Imp-inspired Zone Chat and a forum abuzz with talk about *Cryostasis*, which has left some pleasantly surprised.

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Do you enjoy the cold freezing your blood?

JOWOO: Just got *Cryostasis* through the post and played through the first few levels. Seems to be a bit of a cross between *BioShock* and *Condemned*. It's pretty damn good so far, and if there was an award for "Most Playable Characters in a Game", I reckon this would win it. Unsure what I mean? You'll just have to play the game, won't you?

AOPHIS_DD: No I don't have it, but I was hoping it would be good, after watching a bunch of vids. Along with *BioShock* and *Condemned*, it looks like it has a hint of *STALKER* about it too, texture and style wise.

DUKEM737: Well the *PCZ* review is certainly encouraging. Plus, I loved *Condemned*, so this one gets a buy just as soon as I've finished *Mirror's Edge*, methinks.

CAFF: Same here, big fan of *Condemned*. But not *BioShock* strangely. I think I found the whole stylism of *BioShock* a bit OTT.

BRAX: Ironically (making reference to Mr Brown's review) I found *BioShock* to be a far more conventional FPS game than *Condemned* was.

ANDY_MONAHAN: Aye, *BioShock* was pretty straightforward to be honest. No more revolutionary than say, the *Might and Magic* FPS

"That's a nasty rash you've got there, pal."



that came out the other year (magic = plasmids, moral choices, etc).

BRAX: If you're talking about *Dark Messiah*, I'd argue that its' gameplay made it a tad more genre-bending, if not revolutionary. I ain't never seen FPS melee combat so well-integrated.

Plus the moral choice actually had an impact on the course of the storyline (at least towards the end) instead of having an impact on the final cutscene. Damn it... I just triggered my "must replay now" whim. Now I'll have to re-install it. You bastard.

CAFF: I'm going to buy *Cryostasis*. The review and comments here have made it sound appealing. And some elements of Russian craziness can't go amiss.

There's been a number of games over the years I've ignored due to scoring, particularly in the 75-85% range, but I've come back

to them and they've turned out to be highly addictive. I guess some games appeal to your "inner gaming self". Only long term gamers can understand this - it goes beyond fancy graphics and forced immersive storylines. You just can't put your finger on it.

So, you should all go and buy some different games. Like *Psychonauts*.

DAVID BROWN: I think it is important to remember that 75-85% scores are good scores, that represent games that should be looked at if you have an inkling. They aren't ones that will change your view on a genre, or will be anything that will cause a paradigmatic shift in the industry, but they're still likely to please the majority of (sensible) game players.

CAFF: Totally agree. I've played some really appealing games in that range. One of my favourites was the turn-based RPG *Jagged Alliance 2* - it's still available and you should go buy it. Now!

PCZONE 2009 ON THE BLOG



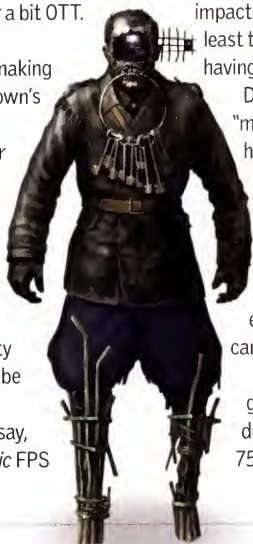
Is also a slipper!

ONLY THROUGH TEAM bonding and exercises involving building a makeshift raft will we be truly whole. That has been the collective thought spewing forth from the Twitter train's smokestacks this month. In fact, we've probably gone overboard with the old Twittering, having almost forgotten our blog even exists.

The fans keep pouring in and we supply them with juicy bitlets of our everyday lives, including the time when Steve's pen ran out when he was taking notes during a presentation, and the hilarious misplacing of somebody's favourite mug. Oh, the thrill-a-minute existence that encompasses our time locked away in Zone Towers.

Our lives, or rather Steve's, were cheered immensely by the arrival of a brand new *Peggle* mug, along with a felt toy Splork. He's even detachable from his spaceship, which itself forms a comfy slipper! Unfortunately, it wasn't long before Steve was bemoaning his ability to ruin everything he touches with his pestilence-riddled hands, failing to clean it properly, a thick coffee scum lining its bottom.

Follow this and comments like it on our Twitter feed at twitter.com/pczone or visit our lovely website at pczone.co.uk.



COME AND
TAKE ON THE
ZONE STAFF IN
OUR MONTHLY
ONLINE GAMING
FREE-FOR-ALL!

FIGHT CLUB

Lag spikes and railguns

OH DEAR, SO much promise and yet such a difficult time was had by all. Well, mostly. Let me explain.

The choice of Fight Club this month, in our new quest to make it a bit more interesting, was the newly launched *Quake Live*. The potential was great, harking back to the old days with the sounds of rockets firing and railguns searing the air. It'd be *Quake III*, except for free. We were all ready to go and then, suddenly, we discovered how difficult it was going to be to set up a match. In the end, we had to find an empty server and dive on it as quickly as possible, before those despicable entities – that is, members of the general public – polluted our refined *ZONE* air with their foul presence.

After about 30 minutes of trying and failing to get a game going, we finally cornered off a 5v5 team deathmatch server and battle was soon joined. Steve chose Blue, Dave chose Red and players flocked to their banners. Two things emerged – the first was that both teams were very evenly

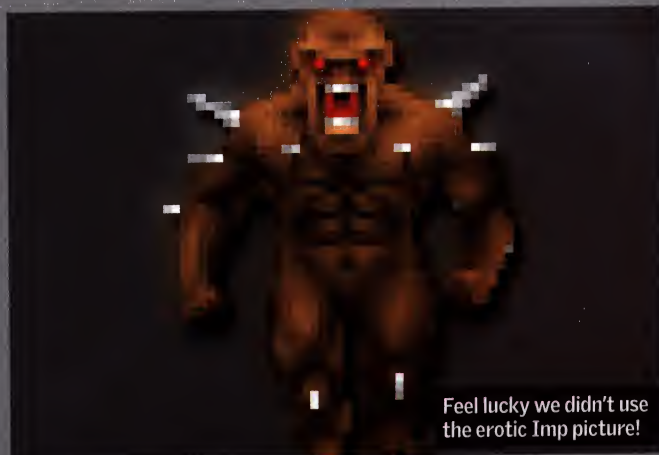


matched, one round of battle even going down to a first-kill-wins deathmatch, which Fight Club regular Flatline managed to deliver for the Blue team.

Secondly, the issue of lag rose its ugly head. The *PCZ* staff in particular were beset by hideous lag spikes and ridiculous "connection interrupted" messages. Apparently it was the same for other players. If *Quake Live* is to be a success – and to be fair this lag hasn't been a constant problem – it will need to address this issue and provide some sort of clan support, so private matches can be enabled. Otherwise people will just get bored of it quickly.

ZONE CHAT

Editorial discretion



Feel lucky we didn't use the erotic Imp picture!

AFTER A BRIEF discussion by the *ZONE* staff about Editors (the band), which was basically a "Yes, they're good/No, they're rubbish" kind of thing, the chatters moved on to more sensible conversation.

Vacuum of Life made himself sound like a small child in '20s America, by saying "Mister, do you work for *PCZ*?" and, when this was confirmed as being true, he replied with the less Depression-era response of "KWL".

Steve then announced that he was enjoying playing *18 Wheels of Steel*, which was met with questions about whether *Euro Truck Simulator* was also on the agenda.

Flatline was then taunted for his lack of possession of the rather excellent frozen water game, *Cryostasis*. After some time, the topic of *Empire: Total War* was raised, which led to *Imperial Glory*, the game made by *Commandos* developers Pyro. Shortened for easier typing to *Imp Glory*, theories on whether a game about vast armies of *Doom*

Imps would have been better than founding worldwide colonial Empires were espoused. The general consensus was that it would be, but that the diplomacy element would definitely suffer.

Think about it: how can you ever imagine an Imp negotiating a trade agreement or swapping technologies? He'd set the treaty papers on fire with his big, fireball-hurling hands!

HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's *ZONE* Chat, join our Steam Community group: *PC ZONE (PCZ)*. If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've decided to become a trialist at West Bromwich Albion – then feel free to join other *PCZ* readers on the following public servers.

WHO'S WHO

Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx
David Brown [PCZ]plughead

BATTLEFIELD 2

85.236.100.48:16567

CALL OF DUTY 4:
MODERN WARFARE
85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE
85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT

85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2:
DEATHMATCH
85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2
85.236.100.48:27115

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

Take your PC gaming to the next level

Windows Vista brings a whole host of next-generation features to the discerning PC gamer. Here are just a few that you need to know about




Windows Vista is the brand new version of Windows. Not only does it offer huge improvements in security, usability and appearance over Windows XP, but it's primed to meet all the demands that 3D games will be throwing at it.

It all revolves around DirectX 10, the new interface that games programmers are going to be using to push the boundaries of 3D games. DirectX 10 brings with it incredible new levels of detail and the ability to have more complex objects moving around in each scene. The result is stunning and offers a much more cinematic experience. Want to see what we're talking about? Just take a look at the in-game footage

of Crysis at www.crysis-online.com. You'll be blown away.

There are other improvements, too. Windows Vista also introduces a new Games Explorer, which will make all your games accessible from a single location. And if you share your PC with your kids, you'll be happy to know that there are built-in parental controls to prevent them playing games unsuitable for their ages. Also, if you own an Xbox 360, it's good to know that its wireless controllers will work with Windows Vista as well.

So, if you want to stay current with your PC gaming, then Windows Vista is the way to go. Oh, and those massive improvements in PC security, usability and appearance? Don't worry, they're all thrown in for free. 

Is my PC up to running Windows Vista?

Don't panic, there's every chance your PC will run Windows Vista without upgrades, especially if it's capable of playing the latest 3D games. But all PCs are not created equal, and to ensure that you get the best gaming experience, only PCs that are worthy can upgrade to Windows Vista.

It's easy to find out if your PC meets the requirements – simply download the free Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor from www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready. Run it on your PC and you'll get the definitive verdict on whether your computer is up to running Windows Vista.

Windows Vista gives each PC a Windows Experience rating that tells you at a glance how powerful

your processor, graphics card, memory and hard drive are, with a single combined score. The higher the number it comes up with, up to a current maximum of 5.9, the better your PC will be able to run Windows Vista and whatever games you want to play on it.



RATE YOUR PC Get an at-a-glance rating of how well your PC will run Windows Vista

Game information

Click on any game icon and you'll see information about who made the game, when you last played it and what version you have.



See saved games

Simply right-click on a game's icon here to get to the Saved Games folder and access your previous saves.

Super Media Center

Windows Media Center is at the heart of the Ultimate and Home Premium editions of Windows Vista. Connect up your PC to an HDTV and browse your music and video collection. What's more, you can bin your set-top DVD recorder! With Media Center and a TV tuner card in your PC, you can play, record and timeshift TV programmes. Get hold of Windows Media Center Extender (a device that plugs into your TV) and you can stream your media from a PC anywhere in your house. If you own an Xbox 360, this Extender capability is already built into it.

All your games

All your games are now stored in one handy location. Install a Windows Vista game, and its icon will appear here.

Game rating

All games designed to be played on Windows Vista are rated, so you can see if your system will be up to playing them. You can also stop the kids from playing ultra-gory games that have adult age ratings.

New built-in games

Old classics, such as Minesweeper and Solitaire, have been improved and updated with Windows Vista, plus there are a few additions, such as Purple Place and Mahjong Titans.

Get more from your PC with Windows Vista: The Official Magazine

If you want to get the very best from your Windows Vista PC then pick up a copy of *Windows Vista Magazine*, which tells you everything you need to know

We show you...

- ➔ How to speed up your PC
- ➔ How to fix common problems
- ➔ How to boost stability
- ➔ The best new kit to buy for your PC
- ➔ Great new games and software



Issue 30 is out now

Find out more at www.windowsvistamagazine.co.uk

EASY LISTING Intuitive menus help you to browse through your music collection

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...



Flashback

GABRIEL KNIGHT

THERE ARE FEW games as intelligently plotted, or as successful at creating a distinct feel for its setting, than *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers*. While we won't go so far as to say "It was just like being there!" about the New Orleans setting, the game created a laid back, down-to-earth feel. And, of course, this was juxtaposed with a sense of doom that grew as the game's story unfolded.

For those of you who don't know him, Gabriel Knight was the owner of a quaint bookshop in the bayou city. As the game went by, Gabe found himself dragged into a murder case involving voodoo rituals and the intoxicating affections of a beautiful stranger.

The Beast Within – the second game – was an interactive movie which

wasn't tripe. Tim Curry, who provided Gabe's drawl in *Sins* and *Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned* (the third game) didn't appear in *Beast*, because they needed someone who looked like the Gabriel for the movie bits. While *Beast* was a good game, it didn't live up to *Sins*' standards. There were a few too many menial, unnecessary tasks to be performed and the final maze puzzle was abominable. Still, it remains one of the best examples of its doomed genre.

Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned moved the series on again, this time to 3D graphics and a story about vampires, France and Jesus. Like *Beast*, *Blood...* never managed to hit the same heights as *Sins of the Fathers*. Some of the characters were a bit dull and they didn't have anywhere near the charm of those in the first game. Added to this, the puzzles were sometimes too obtuse or frustrating.

The series, taken as a whole, was and always will be fantastic, and we can still vividly remember when a cold English winter in 1993 felt like a balmy night in New Orleans. [And with that, David never wrote a Retro Zone again – Ed]



But how? Get your PC knighted

DOSBox is your best bet to get *Sins of the Fathers* to work. Be aware it's a pain to get running, especially if you want the CD version with Mark 'Skywalker' Hamill, Michael 'Wolf' Dorn, and Tim 'Scenery Chewer' Curry providing their voices.

The Beast Within works in XP, if you set your desktop colour settings to a low level. *Blood etc* was developed for XP, so should work in XP or *Vista* with no hassle.

dosbox.com

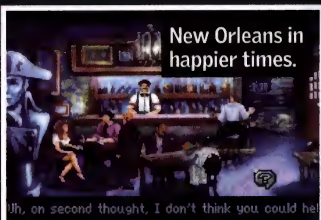
Where to get *DOSBox*. This is an emulator is key to playing old games.

dfendreloaded.sourceforge.net

Alternatively use this graphical interface, which includes *DOSBox*.

thehouseofgames.net

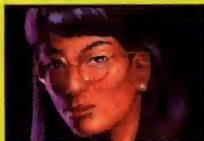
Stuff we can't talk about for legal reasons.



The Beasts Within The characters that made the *Gabriel Knight* games classics



1 GABE
The lovable titular rogue Gabriel is fondly remembered because he was flawed as a person.



2 GRACIE
Gabriel's long-suffering assistant. As she hates to admit it, she fancies him rotten.



3 MOSELY
Franklin Mosely (voiced by Mark Hamill in *Sins*) is a semi-competent cop who helps Gabe out.



4 VON GLOWER
Baron Friedrich von Glower is both mysterious and evil, yet somehow still a sympathetic character.



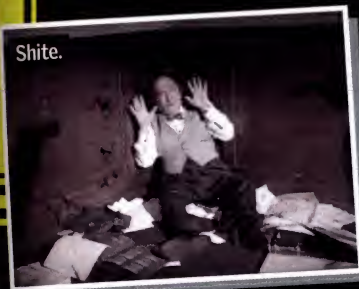
5 LUDWIG II
The legend of Bavaria's last monarch forms part of the plot of *The Beast Within*.



6 JANE JENSEN
Creator of the *Gabriel Knight* series. Her other work includes *Gray Matter*, out later this year. Maybe.

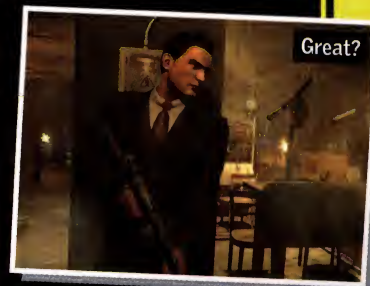
Now & Then

GANGSTERS vs MAFIA



GANGSTERS MIGHT WELL have featured 5,000 citizens to brutalise and intimidate, plus 400 individual mafiosi to order about, but it didn't stop it being a bit rubbish. *Mafia* had numerous bugs and legendarily difficult racing missions, but was one of the best games of its generation, so good that we are soiling ourselves with excitement at the prospect of the second game. Need we say nobody was doing this when the second *Gangsters* game sheepishly loped onto our desktops?

The object of the older game was to control your hoodlums in a *SimCity*-style fashion, which sounds interesting in theory, but is actually duller than a primetime ITV drama. Even EA's *Godfather* games are better than *Gangsters*. *Mafia* made gangsters cool, *Gangsters* made them look like bumbling fools.



Play it! If you want to punish yourself, here's how to get *Gangsters* working

- 1 Buy the game from a reputable online retailer, such as Amazon.co.uk, and install it onto your shiny PC. You never know, it might work straight away without help.
- 2 If it doesn't, you might want to try running it in *XP* and *Vista*'s compatibility mode for *Windows 98*, as it was released before the turn of the century.
- 3 *Gangsters* should work on *XP* without any trouble. And there's a version available for that OS that includes the vaguely average sequel, *Gangsters 2*.
- 4 Alternatively, travel back in time, bring back a *Windows 98* PC, and play *Gangsters* as it was meant to be played. Then stop and buy a copy of *Mafia* instead.

MAMEframe

IVAN 'IRONMAN' STEWART'S SUPER OFF-ROAD



THE FIRST TIME we actually played this was on the Spectrum, so it never looked as good as this. Replace half of the colours with yellow and half with black and you've got the Speccy experience down. Still, the game was just as good on my faithful ZX +3 with a wobbly power cable as it ever was in *DOS*. Maybe.

Anyway, you and three AIs (or two AI and one other human) would battle across eight solo-screen race tracks, with the titular Ironman being the toughest driver to beat. Other drivers could include 'Madman' Sam Powell, 'Hurricane' Earl Stratton and 'Jammin' John Morgan. Money could be collected by doing well and then spent in the shop, where you could buy upgrades to your vehicle, like better acceleration, bigger nitro allowance and so on.

The game was addictive and always great fun to play. All I wonder now is what the hell happened to the Ironman? Answers on a postcard please.



What is MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator currently emulates over 3,500 games. You can get it from mame.net - use Mame32 for a nice front-end. Then you can download Robby Roto, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it.

Back in the day



THEME HOSPITAL

By David Brown

I DON'T HAVE the patience for management games, so one has to be excellent to grab me, and *Theme Hospital* was that. It was colourful, but not twee; amusing, but never forced; it had personality.

Not since *Syndicate* had I played a Bullfrog game I'd truly enjoyed. The fact it had a multiplayer mode (where you could set off litter bombs in your opponent's hospital to spark a dreaded vomit outbreak) meant it was groundbreaking for a number of reasons.

In the end, it was just damn good fun to play, although those vomit epidemics were frustrating. Does a hospital really need to have more handymen than doctors? Do people in real life just stand in the middle of the room and throw up all over the floor? Do they then fall into said vomit, curl up and die? Well, perhaps in some NHS hospitals.

On The PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



18 WHEELS OF STEEL: AMERICAN LONG HAUL

Got a great big convoy: **Steve Hogarty**

DON'T LAUGH, BUT I played this for six and a half hours over the weekend. I trucked from San Jose to Roswell, and from there to LA and San Francisco. It was hard work, an epic journey of 1,800 miles spanning many in-game days of lane changes and weigh stations.



On more than one occasion I'd trucked too hard and found my in-game self falling asleep. I imagined my virtual head lolling back as I gently choked on my cyber tongue, an unstoppable 40 tonnes of metal cruising at 50mph, inching its way into the outside lane. A jolt woke me from my snooze. I'd ploughed into a van, probably killing someone, incurring a bothersome fine.

I pressed the button to make me sleep, which you can do anywhere, at any time, without consequence, and continued on my journey refreshed. If I could avoid the police for a few days, the fine would be forgotten about, and I'd remain free. So I constantly scanned

the layby for bears. That's what truckers call police. For fun, I'd wait until a car was trying to pass me on the motorway, before indicating into their lane and forcing them to brake suddenly. I did this over and over again.

Sometimes I'd talk to people on the CB radio. I'd say things like "Anybody got a 10-13?" which translates to: "How's the weather?". They'd ask about traffic, and I'd feed them misleading untruths, announcing that there were jams the next 10 miles when the roads were empty.



18 Wheels of Steel has a real sense of progression as you claw your way across the country. But it's lonely, simulating that part of the trucker life a bit too well. That was a pretty desolate weekend for me.

VERDICT Trucking brilliant

CIVILIZATION IV: WARLORDS

Strategic idiot: **Richard Cosgrove**

I HAVE NO idea why I play this game. None. I have all the strategic smarts of a mousse. Saying that I'm fairly certain that a refrigerated mixture of whipped sugar, egg whites and cream would be better at this game than me.

Even on the lowest difficulty setting (Moron) I'm continually beaten. Last time I played it, my civilization of eight cities was overrun by barbarians. To me a 'barbarian' runs about with clubs wearing furs. In *Civ4* they seem to take over your cities and threaten you with aircraft carriers and nuclear weapons.

Actually, I did well in that game having eight cities. Normally I can't build more than five. I know what the problem is – I love building Wonders. When all the other AI civilisations are pumping out Settlers and boats to colonise every part of the world, and military units to make war, I'm wasting resources by sticking up Pyramids,

Great Walls, Angkor Wats, Hanging Gardens, and Rock 'n' Rolls.

I have no idea how to be diplomatic, and listen in wonder as David says how he goads other civilizations into war. I didn't realise you could take over cities using Culture until Will told me, weeks after I stopped playing. And as for warfare, I don't bother with it, because I'm incompetent.

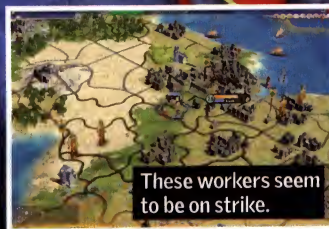


Two Wonders/wastes of resources.

Really the only reason I play *Civ4* is the technology tree. I find it endlessly fascinating how you can get Writing before Alphabet, and how a Code of Laws creates Monarchy, and how fundamental Farming is, yet Irrigation is missing.

That and I love making the Kremlin appear in London.

VERDICT Good game, crap player



These workers seem to be on strike.

F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN

Scared of girls: **David Brown**

A FEW MONTHS back, I argued the toss with Steve about why *Waxworks* was scary and *F.E.A.R. 2* wasn't. I'd

like to backtrack a little from my militant stance and qualify my statements. *F.E.A.R. 2* isn't scary, on

Dammit. I got some gore in my eyes.



the whole, but there have been two incidents which made me jump. A bit.

One is right at the beginning, before you even get off the military vehicle you are being transported in. Another bit is slightly further on from that, where you turn and find Alma standing right next to you. That was unexpected and, therefore, unnerving. However, since that point, the shocks have been anything but. They're all far too obvious and those scuttling people/creatures are about as scary as an episode of *Scooby Doo*.

Perhaps part of this is down to the fact the game is so ridiculously easy for the most part, especially if you are liberal with the use of the slo-mo ability. Like in *BioShock*, if there is no chance of imminent death, there is no tension and, if there is no tension, there's no chance in hell I'm ever going to be on edge enough to be unnerved by something happening in a game. The first *F.E.A.R.* had this tension, as death was a much more consistent companion. This time out, the game just doesn't impose itself on you in the same way – even if it doesn't have so many boring corridors.

VERDICT Fearless

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

JOWOO FALLOUT 3

Every time I think I'm getting bored of this game it throws something completely unexpected into the mix. Don't listen to the gripers, there are some genuinely brilliant – and staggeringly deep – quests on offer.

APOPHIS_DD GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

It's just like playing *Left 4 Dead*. Except you're killing Mexicans instead of zombies.

ALBERTHAMMOND FACES OF WAR

Went out to buy the new *Men of War* and found this prequel for £2.50. *MOW* can wait. *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II* was a favourite of mine and this is more of the same.

Tell us what's on your hard drive in the forums at pczone.co.uk



Kyle has never beaten Ron at battleship. Not through lack of trying.

WORLD OF GOO

Jon Blyth meets the 2D Boys, Kyle Gabler and Ron Carmel

IF YOU DON'T own *World of Goo*, then you're doing yourself a huge disservice. And you should probably be deprived of all communication until you have played it, because your opinion is not worth hearing.

World of Goo is the game by 2D Boy, and conceived by Kyle Gabler, a man whose simple tower-building gameplay prototype

proved very popular. So popular, that he developed it into one of the most well-conceived and perfectly executed indie hits of 2008.

The intelligent position on DRM, and good-natured, off-beat humour of Gabler and 2D Boy co-founder Ron Carmel shines through in everything they do and say. As Jon Blyth found out when he was lucky enough to catch up with them.

**experimental
gameplay
project**

games developers articles
top rated | most talked about | most recent | name | random

**tower of goo
unlimited!**

From tiny flash games
indie classics do grow.

rate this game: 1 2 3 4 5

view: 25673
dl: 1282

Tower of Goo UNLIMITED!

kylegabler
Developer 12

Same game, but now infinite in all directions! (If you've never played before, you should check the original below...)

Thanks for your feedback and suggestions! IMPORTANT NOTE if you are wondering how this relates to World of Goo: I made this short prototype "Tower of Goo" several years ago as an experiment in just a few days. It's buggy and doesn't even run on some computers! So please don't think it's representative of World of Goo - only the basic idea was carried over - World of Goo is much more friendly, stable, and filled with delicious! More on it here <http://2dboy.com>

TowerOfGooUnlimited.exe
tower of goo unlimited armadillo tower of goo kyle gabler tower of goo shivaca

01 EXPERIMENTAL

GABLER: Some friends and I created the Experimental Gameplay Project in grad school. The goal was to create as many small games as possible in order to discover as many new forms of gameplay as we could. *Tower of Goo* was one of the games I made in the project, just a little green hill and 100 profanity squealing Goo Balls, which later sprouted into the idea behind *World of Goo*.

Both *Crayon Physics Deluxe* and *Audiosurf* started out as small prototypes as well. In fact, prototyping has become a bit of a hot topic among game studios over the last few years. The idea is that you can make a quick prototype of a game in one

or two weeks, so a studio doesn't spend three years and \$35million only to discover an innovative new game idea is actually kind of underwhelming. Some studios seem to have embraced rapid prototyping more than other studios. But it seems to be working very well for indie developers.

Spore also started out as a collection of little prototypes made by geniuses like the Chaim Gingold and Chris Hecker wonder duo. I think it's common knowledge by now that the *Creature Creator* was one of the very early prototypes to come out of the project, and is widely regarded as one of the most satisfying parts of the whole game.

"All DRM schemes get cracked, so it's pointless trying to prevent piracy this way"

02 DIGITAL WRONGS

CARMEL: We have no regrets about releasing *World of Goo* DRM-free. All DRM schemes get cracked so it's pointless to spend time and money trying to prevent piracy in this way. We prefer to mistakenly treat pirates like legitimate customers than to treat legitimate customers like pirates.

There will always be piracy, and we believe that fighting it is futile. We think there must be a way to accept piracy, and even rely on it to promote sales. We haven't developed that kind of kung-fu yet, but we love thinking about it!

03 FROM TOWER TO WORLD

GABLER: While making *Tower of Goo*, my crappy apartment in the bitter winter of Pittsburgh had some sort of natural gas leak, so I was mostly pre-occupied with not being blown up. Meanwhile, a scary number of people starting discovering *Tower of Goo* on the Experimental Gameplay Project, as well as all the other games.

There were ad hoc leaderboard competitions to see who could build the highest, or who could erect the most obscene sculptures. I had hoped *Tower of Goo* could grow into something bigger one day, but never imagined it would become a whole *World of Goo*, and then get on a Nintendo console, and then be played by the guy who created Mario and Zelda. My parents wouldn't even let me have a Nintendo as a kid. Now I'm forcing them to get a Wii.



Tower of Goo is referenced in the full game, right here.



It's a shiny new product!

04 REJECTIONS

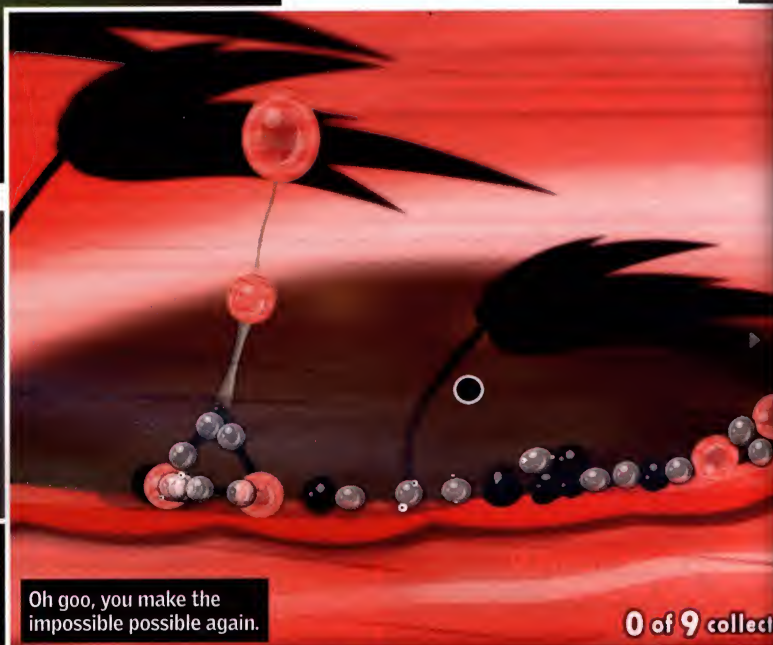
GABLER: Making *World of Goo* was like that big block of marble that gets hammered and chipped and chiselled away until some sort of statue appears. Nearly two of every three levels were chiselled because they weren't good enough, or different enough.

Some Goo Balls that didn't make it included the Wheel Goo, which spun when attached like eager little motors; Fungus Goo, who sprouted more Goos and grew into structures automatically; and Thruster Goo, which acted like little directional jetpacks.

Rest in peace, little Goos, we'll never forget you.

05 SELLING INDIE

CARMEL: Smaller teams like ours rely on favourable press and word of mouth to generate sales. Despite all the press we've been getting, most gamers still have never heard about *World of Goo*. What's nice about services like Steam is that they have a captive audience. If a service like that picks up your game it gets placed in front of millions of players who might have otherwise never been exposed to it. Steam has done very well for us and I would recommend it highly.



0 of 9 collect



Use mines to blow open walls and release goos.

06 THE SOUND OF GOO

GABLER: I wrote the music in my computer with a bunch of sampled instruments. Over the years, I've been building up a small collection of digital instruments by taking single notes of friends singing or playing a violin, or cello, or trumpet, and then sticking the single notes into a sampling program so that I can play them back at various pitches with a keyboard to create choirs and orchestras and other effects. I think Ursula the Sea Witch did something similar in *The Little Mermaid*.

The main theme to *World of Goo* is inspired by the song *Libertango* by Ástor Piazzolla, which was the background music in the original *Tower of Goo*. The *Ode to the Bridge Builder* song is a dramatic little love theme for Alex Austin, the creator of the *Bridge Builder* series of games.

07 NEXT

CARMEL: Over the course of development we had a ton of different ideas... visual styles, feelings, rendering tricks, game mechanics, all kinds of things that we're eager to prototype. Honestly, we don't know if any of these would make sense as part of a game, but we think they'll be fun to play with and we're looking forward to testing them.

But before anything happens, we need to decompress. We poured our souls into this game and now we have

very little soul left. We need to be lazy and spend more time with our friends and start eating healthy again. And then, one day, the inspiration fairy will come visit us. She'll hover over our heads and say something like "you're running out of money, you idiots" and we'll get back to work.

GABLER: And don't forget about the Innovation Fairy and the Feelings Fairy. Feelings Fairy carries a shotgun.



08 STICKING POINTS

GABLER: I think some players don't notice there's a story in *World of Goo*. And that's OK. I don't like it when games and movies try to force me to care about their story. The worst is when the hero has a glowing sepia flashback to a happy moment with their kid, and the audience are understand the character's motivation for rescuing their dumb kid.

The story in *World of Goo* hopefully doesn't play out like a story, but like a series of feelings, like the cheap way you feel when you're being marketed to by a soft drink mascot. Or watching little characters believe in something that you know isn't there. Or the feeling of rubbing goo all over your face, and you're not sure how to feel about that.

"Some players don't notice there's a story. And that's OK"



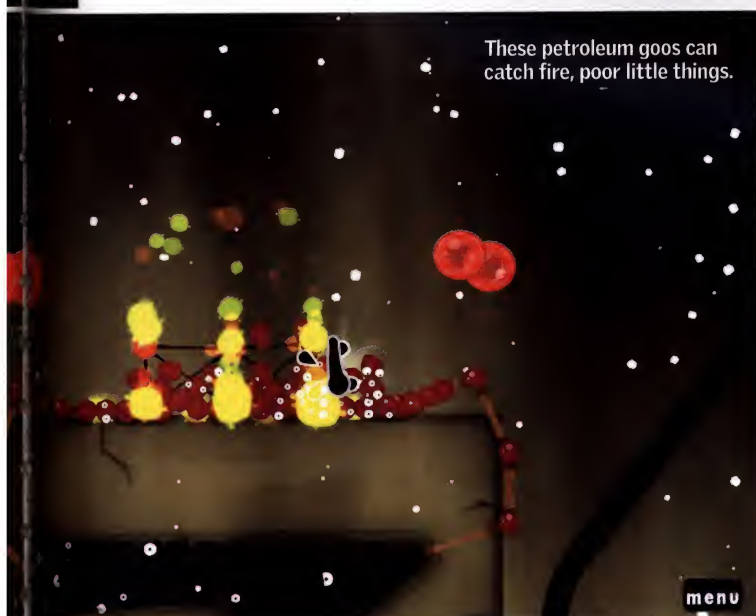
09 GOING SOLO

CARMEL: Implementation is more important than the idea. A game idea has to be good for a game to be good, but I think most games fail on implementation, not on the idea.

World of Goo has a very basic mechanic, one that's been around for a couple of years now ever since *Tower of Goo*. It's the implementation of the idea, the little details, the ambiance, the humour, the music, the gameplay twists, and the constantly changing environments that draw people into the game.

For anyone considering "going indie" I would highly recommend it. The worst that can happen is that your game will not make enough money for you to keep going and you'll need to go back to work for the man. If you are seriously considering it, make sure you jump ship with a team that has all the necessary skill sets to finish the game: design, programming, art, sound. If you have that, you can make a game.

These petroleum goos can catch fire, poor little things.



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ON SALE
**13
MAY**

**WELCOME TO
THE MADHOUSE!**

BATMAN ARKHAM ASYLUM

Bats is in the belfry as The Joker arrives in Arkham Asylum. Prepare for Rocksteady Studios to let hell loose!



BIG SISTER IS HERE!

BIOSHOCK 2

We find out if there's something in the sea in an exclusive chat with Irrational about 2009's most eagerly awaited sequel!

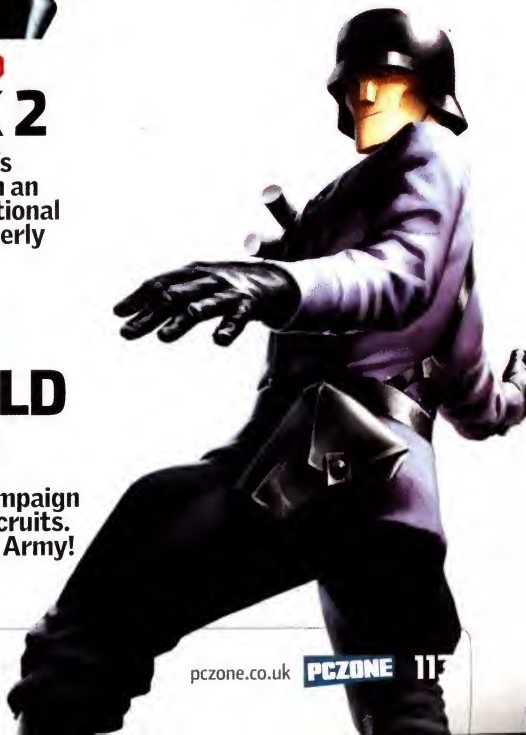
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BATTLEFIELD HEROES

Our *Battlefield Heroes* campaign kicks off and we need recruits. Time to join The National Army!

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X-MEN ORIGINS:
WOLVERINE**



All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change. PCZONE is a little mistress, much like the sea or lady luck.

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PCZONE

117



maxpayne

Follow

My life was a series of 140 character updates. Inane chatter cast uselessly into a cyber abyss. Funny as hell, it was the most horrible thing I could think of.

8.11 PM April 7th from web

He is serious about phone so I am turning off now.

1.57 PM April 7th from Tweetie

Doctor is operating on my toe. Says phones must be turned off in hospital. Says it's dangerous. Guess I'm just a dangerous kind of guy.

1.55 PM April 7th from Tweetie

Doctor says toenail is ingrown. I tell him city is ingrown: society turning in on itself, exposing the fetid pus of our darkest fears. He says no, the toenail is ingrown.

9.28 AM April 7th from Tweetie

The hospital waiting room has been mopped with disinfectant. It lingers heavy in the air, this scent of sickness. I am reading Grazia.

9.20 AM April 7th from Tweetie

Showered. Crime is a sort of dirt that doesn't wash away. Death is a stench that can't be aired. Timotei works well on armpits.

6.01 AM April 7th from web

The Cheerios would ease the pain.

5.49 AM April 7th from web

Waking up, the dawn shot through me like shards of ice. Morning wood. Dry mouth. Toe hurts again. Reality floods back into view like a surging surf of despair.

Name Max Payne (maxpayne)

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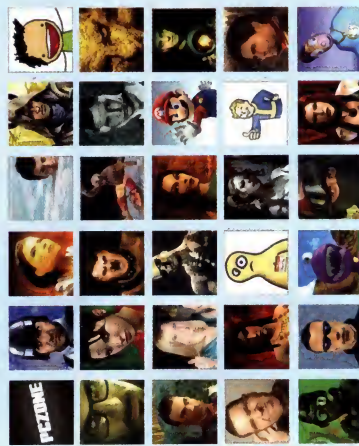
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